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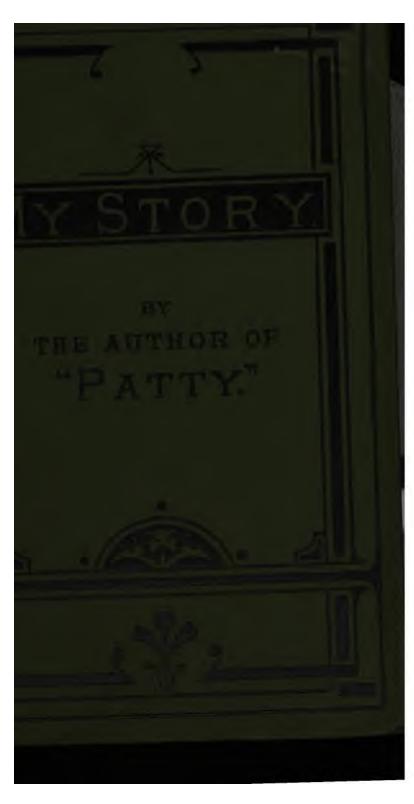
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MY STORY.

VOL. II.







MY STORY.

BY

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"PATTY," "THROUGH NORMANDY,"

&c., &c.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MY STORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE CLEAVE.

MY accident had taught me caution, and though I knew I was late in setting out, I climbed slowly and carefully when I reached the stony field. A little higher than the point where we had rested, the rocks were so large and so closely piled together, that I had to seek for spaces between them for myfeet; even my love of danger shrank from climbing these bare, rough masses. I paused at last, out of breath, and felt giddy as I looked behind me; my last quarter of an hour's climb had been

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almost perpendicular, but I did not linger, though Merdon and its surrounding hills were exquisite in the brilliant sunshine. When I had mounted a yet steeper bit than any I had climbed, I saw I should be at the top, and Mr. Newton had told me the top looked down into the Cleave.

The sound of laughing voices made me hesitate, and presently a small, pretty-faced woman passed along the ridge above me; two donkeys followed; there was a young girl on each donkey, and the whole party looked startlingly massive against the blue sky.

I thought I heard them say something about me and my accident, and I guessed that they might be Mrs. Tracey, the Rector's wife, and her daughters.

I wonder why Mr. Donald speaks so coldly of them? They look very nice; my heart warms at the sight of something young. It would be great fun to have the Traceys to scramble about with. But in

a minute more I forget them and Mr. Donald too, for I reach the ridge, and look down at last into the Cleave; a steep valley, some miles in length, and nearly a mile across, from the rugged brow on which I stand to the green hills opposite. Down, so far below that the trees hide it, is a brawling river; it must be fighting its way among rocks, from the noise which reaches me even at this height. The steep cliff I stand on is cumbered with fragments of grey rock, and as far as I can see on either hand these masses of granite are piled one a-top of another in the most irregular confusion; some like old castles with broken battlements; on others yellow furze is in gay blossom; on one close below me a mountain ash has found a crevice for its roots, and stands now in the full glory of its scarlet berries, their colour made more intense by the setting sun; some are golden with lichen spots, and sombre with ivy; on my right · : . . •

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likes her. I suppose she fascinates me because she is clever and unlike anyone else, but she makes out life to be a miserable series of mistakes. Did she love her husband? and is it his death that has soured her?

And then I wonder whether Mr. Dayrell is really dead. I have not heard that Mrs. Dayrell is a widow. Her words about love come back. Did she and her husband love one another, and do they no longer love? Is it, then, possible that love can change? Shall I leave off loving Eugène? Will he forget me? Ah! no; I do not think so, and Mrs. Dayrell may not have been really loved in the same way.

I flush suddenly; why, how faithless and forgetful I am, just because Mrs. Dayrell disturbed my mind, I rushed up here instead of going to inquire for my letter. How delightful it would be to receive my father's and Eugène's at once! But weeks must pass before I can get my

father's letter. I am sure he will refuse to sanction my marriage; I know his aristocratic prejudices are stronger than my mother's were.

It is now September; if my father writes directly, I can get his letter in December, at latest in January, and then I will tell Madame La Peyre at once about Eugène. If I could only sleep away the time that comes between! I will go back now to the post-office. I jump up and look round.

The sun has sunk much lower; suddenly every bit of colour is intensified; the meadow shows greener yet against the olive of the woods. The furze shines out with a more golden yellow, the ash-berries glow with a yet more scarlet tinge; only for a short while, and then the sun dips behind the farthest hill, and the colour flies skywards, leaving a hue, velvet-like in softness, on all below, while it spreads a rosy glow over the spot where its creator has just departed.

I look down to the wooded river, and I see some one coming up towards me from among the misty trees. It is so gloomy down there that I cannot see distinctly; it may either be a man or a cow. I hardly know why, but I feel timid, and I turn to go home; but it is far more difficult to climb down these rough upright crags than it was to scale them, and I am afraid to go quickly. I wish most intensely for Mr. Donald's help, or even for pippin-faced Frank Newton.

I stop at last out of breath. I feel ready to cry, now that there is no one to seem brave before. I do not think one is brave only from humbug, but there is an excitement in companionship which helps one's courage.

A stone rattles down past me; I look behind me in terror, and I see a man standing on the ridge. He is looking down into the Cleave, so his back is towards me; he is certainly not Frank Newton or Mr. Donald—he is much bigger than either of them; he looks gigantic, looming there against the green-grey sky.

My heart beats in a flutter. I do not know what I fear, but a stranger seems something portentous in Merdon. I can get on faster now; the bits of rock are farther apart, and I can wind in and out without climbing; but still I remember my fall, and I move cautiously till I reach the grass at the botton of the descent; then I hurry on. As I reach the white gate I look back. The man is coming down the rocks like a goat, springing from one to another far more easily than Frank Newton climbed them. I stand a minute to watch him, and then I speed through the gate, letting it slam behind me. It is not a stranger at all—it is Captain Brand; he must have recognized me, and he is hurrying over the rocks to overtake me.

CHAPTER II.

ONE TOO MANY.

"I THOUGHT. it was you! I am so glad!"

He has overtaken me in a minute, and here he is actually with both my hands in his, as if he were my lover.

His eyes are quite bright, and he fixes them on me so intently that I have to look away. I am so vexed! I hope he will not think I am glad to see him—I am only confused because of my fright and the haste I have made. I force myself to look up quite coolly.

"How well you look!" he says.

His eyes are more admiring than Mr. Newton's, and there is such a sparkle of delight in them! I ought not to be cross—the poor man is really glad to see me, I suppose.

"I need not ask if Merdon suits you, or if you are happy, Gertrude."

I wish Captain Brand would call me Miss Stewart—and yet I shrink from telling him so, because I want to prevent any of that kind of talk which we had in the cabin of the *Eclair*. I turn away, and begin to walk along the stony lane.

"Yes, I am quite happy, thank you. I like Madame La Peyre extremely."

"I am so glad. I ought to have written to you. I wanted to write, but I have been very busy, and I have been travelling constantly—and you will forgive me?"

He speaks so penitently that I can hardly help laughing. Does he really think I should care to read his letters? But I have grown to feel so sure of my future freedom that I am able to be more friendly to Captain Brand, and I will try and re-

member only the kindness he has shown me. I look up at him; I feel rather mischievous.

"I am not good at writing or at reading letters either. I think it is waste of time; no news is good news, you know."

I did not think Captain Brand could throw so much expression into his eyes—he looks quite sprightly. I suppose it would be more dignified to look as if I did not like his admiration; but then it does not hurt me, and he seems to like it.

"You cannot have much to do with your time down here;"—he walks as close beside me as the stones will let him—"don't you think it would amuse you to write a little? Do you know, Gertrude, I am quite looking forward to some letters from you while I am in the North? I believe,"—he hesitates, and I glance at him, but there is a look in his face I do not like; surely he has forgotten all I said to him on board the *Eclair*!—"I believe," he goes on

quietly, "it may be better for us both to write letters to each other."

"Indeed I cannot promise to write."

I feel there is the old dislike in my voice, for I am thinking of Eugène, and how cruelly Captain Brand came between us that morning.

"My child,"—his voice vibrates, and I feel angry and inclined to laugh all at once,
—"trust me; that is all I ask of you now, though I feel you cannot trust me till you know more of me; and unless I write to you, what chance have I—I—of speaking out? It is our only chance of understanding one another."

It is such a relief to hear the click of the gate at the end of the lane—we are quite near it, although we cannot see it, because of a bend in the path. I hear a stick striking sharply against the stones, and the next minute there is Frank Newton, whistling "Home, sweet home," which I sang to him on his last visit. I hurry on, and come in sight of him, while Captain Brand is still hidden.

"Ah! is it you? Have you really been up the Cleave alone?" he says. "What a shame! Why did you not give me the happiness—" Here Captain Brand comes in view. I watch Mr. Newton's face—it is great fun to see it! First his mouth opens, and his jaw droops as if it were going to fall off all together, and then he turns fiery red. I cannot help it—I begin to laugh.

"Well, I don't know," I said—"I might have fallen, as I did last time, and I do not think you could have carried me home by yourself."

"Did you fall on those rocks?" cries Captain Brand, in an alarmed tone.

All my new liking for him vanishes; he speaks as if I belonged to him—as if he had some sort of control over me. I answer without looking at him.

"Yes, I fell—running down to the gate."

I suppose my careless manner provokes him—he speaks so sternly.

"Why did you not tell me? Did you hurt yourself? How can you be so careless? You might have been killed."

I do not think I ever felt so angry. Captain Brand was admiring and submissive five minutes ago, and now he is treating me like a naughty child before Mr. Newton.

"Well,"—I try to look as if I were very much amused, and I glance at Frank Newton, to show him that I think he ought to be amused too—"I did not kill myself, and I did not hurt anybody else; but I am afraid I tired the friend who carried me home. How kind he was!"

"It was no kindness at all," says Frank Newton, sulkily. "Why, anyone would be too glad to be of use to you; of course it is a happiness." Here he pulls at those dear little curly black whiskers, till I feel sure he must hurt himself. "You should not tell me so." I try to look as sweet as possible—it would be a comfort if I could see whether Captain Brand looks cross, but he keeps walking just behind Mr. Newton and me—between us; we are on opposite sides of the lane, and I know he can see both our faces. "I am so kind-hearted that I may grow to consider it my duty to fall down the rocks periodically, just to give happiness to my fellow-creatures."

Actually Mr. Newton does not see I am teazing. He strides eagerly over a huge stone in the path and walks close beside me.

"I don't like that word," he says, in a low voice; "I don't like to think you only consider me a fellow-creature."

I cannot help laughing a little at this. Mr. Donald often looks sentimental, but then his great blue eyes are fit for sentiment—there is plenty of room in them for it; but Frank Newton's eyes are small and dry-looking—there is so little of them that when he turns them up I see nothing but the whites. The thought that comes to me is that he is making himself look more like a fish than a fellow-creature.

"Well, a friend, then." Mr. Newton's eyes come down at once from the sky; he looks delighted.

"I don't know how to thank you."

I wish he would not speak so distinctly; I do not care if Captain Brand hears that we are talking nonsense, but there is no need that he should hear all we say.

"Please will you open the gate?"

I look forward, and Mr. Newton darts off, and stands holding the gate open, wide enough for a drove of bullocks to pass.

"Who is that, Gertrude?"

I start at the sound of Captain Brand's voice; he is close beside me, he really often speaks in the harshest manner. I shall just teach him at once that he is not to speak in that way to me again. I look up at

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him, he is frowning, but I do not feel at all frightened now by his angry looks.

"Mr. Newton is the squire here; he is a great friend of mine; he owns all this property."

I hold my head stiffly, and then I move on to join Frank Newton at the gate. But I feel sorry already for what I have said. I had resolved that when next Captain Brand came to Merdon I would try to conciliate him, and get him to promise not to say anything to Madame La Peyre about the marriage—I always think of it as the marriage—it never was mine—And now I have made him angry, and I have also given up the only chance of saying a private word to him before he sees Madame La Peyre.

"Who is that?" Frank Newton asks in a low voice, when I reach the gate; "is he a friend of yours?"

I blush, I guess by his manner that he thinks Captain Brand is hardly the sort of person to be called my friend.

"He is my guardian," and I look up at Mr. Newton and give a sigh of weariness. He lets the gate swing to, and we go on together without troubling ourselves about Captain Brand.

"Guardians and governesses are bores, people to be left behind," says Mr. Newton, laughing in a complacent way, as if he had said something really clever; "now Donald is a capital fellow, isn't he, considering he is a tutor?—so easy-going."

"Mr. Donald is not at all like a tutor, he is charming—perhaps all tutors are charming; he is the first I have known."

"Charming!—well, I don't know about that—that's going too far," the poor youth is terribly thick-skinned, he does not see I am vexed, and that I am teasing him, he is only jealous at hearing any one else praised. "You see these fellows that have to earn their bread by teaching are obliged to stick so close to work, and

cram so awfully, that they have no time for the pursuits of gentlemen."

"You mean that study and reading are not gentlemanlike pursuits."

He looks at me as if he did not understand.

"Well, that's going a little too far; but I think that both in men and women they are fitter pursuits for those who have to work for their living than for others. Of course education does not matter for servants and labourers, and that sort of thing, but I quite agree with it for people who have to make their way in the world; but what is the use of classical knowledge to a military man, or to anyone who has to live on his property?"

I had never learned Latin, but I had picked up bits and scraps from my governess.

"Dear me, I should have thought a knowledge of Virgil very essential in a country life; there is a good deal about farming in Virgil, is there not?" He looked crestfallen at once.

"I believe so; but I hate Latin. I suppose you consider Donald ought to be master of Merdon instead of me because he knows more Latin"—he gives a little uneasy laugh—"Well, I wish—yes, I just wish you would talk to the Traceys, and hear what they say."

I hear Captain Brand close behind us.

"If the Traceys do not like Mr. Donald, I shall not like them."

I want to affront Mr. Newton and make him go off in a huff, so that I may be able to get a few minutes with Captain Brand, and caution him not to tell Madame La Peyre. But I may as well expect that big mossgrown rock, twenty feet high at least, which sits there on the side of the wooded hill, to come toppling down on our heads; the foolish fellow thinks he is doing me a service by interfering with my guardian. He must say good-bye when we reach home—that is my comfort. Vain hope!

When we come in sight of the cottage, Madame La Peyre is standing at the garden-gate, looking strangely perplexed and anxious. She clasps her hands when she sees us.

"But what is it, Gertrude? Where then hast thou been? I have been tormented in a manner."

Here she holds up both her pretty, delicate hands, and then as I run up to her she kisses me on the forehead, after she has first curtseyed to Captain Brand. I suppose Mr. Newton thought he was not wanted, for when I looked back he was gone.

"My child," says Madame, earnestly, "I thought thou hadst fallen down the rocks again, and I was looking for some one to send in search of thee."

CHAPTER III.

MADAME LA PEYRE'S COMFORT.

GOT up next morning in a very discontented state. The lovely sunset had left behind it lowering clouds; they sat on Dartmoor, brooding in such immovable gray heaviness, that I felt restless, and I think cross. I had tried the whole evening to get a word alone with Captain Brand, and Madame La Peyre had not given me a chance; she even hurried me off to bed early, saying I must be tired after my long walk. I stood looking out of window this morning. Just as I turned from those sulky-looking clouds on Dartmoor, I perceived, in the waste bit (neither garden nor

yard, but a sort of fusion of both) which is beneath my window, Madame La Peyre in earnest talk with Captain Brand. back from the window instantly, and again I felt a strong inclination to run away from Merdon. I forgot to say that Captain Brand left a packet for me when he was here last, and when I opened it there were twenty-five sovereigns and a memorandum, saying that this was all the property left by my mother. I kept five pounds for myself, and gave the rest to Madame La Peyre, to take care of; and now I wished I had kept all. Madame La Peyre, I am sure, will side with Captain Brand when she knows the story; and she will look on him as my husband, for I saw last night how much she liked him. walked up and down my room restlessly. At last I rang the bell.

"Angélique, my head aches, and I do not want to go down to breakfast. Will you bring me a cup of coffee and some bread?" Angélique stood and contemplated me for an instant, and then to my relief she said, "Bien, Mademoiselle," and went away.

How wise she is! Is it because she is a French woman? An ordinary English nurse in her position would not have studied my face as Angélique did just now. She would have said,

"Oh! Miss Gertrude, how can you take such fancies? Go down to breakfast, do, like a dear young lady."

And I should infallibly have told her to mind her own business.

I felt that I could not face Captain Brand and Madame La Peyre together just after their conversation. Something in the earnest way in which he bent his head down, and in her intent listening, told me that they were talking of the marriage. As I walked up and down, I grew quieter. Angélique brought my coffee, daintily arranged on a little tray. Perhaps the coffee cleared my brains. It

was natural that Captain Brand should tell Madame La Peyre, and I no longer felt so sure that she would side entirely against me. I think she has guessed that which Captain Brand does not know—my love for Eugène. I fancied that it was to distract me from this that she had encouraged Mr. Newton's visits, for she was always cordial to him. She was as kind to Mr. Donald, but she treated him as if he were so very much older.

It came to me with a pang of remorse that I had not been to the post-office yesterday, before I went to the Cleave, to see if there was a letter from Eugène. I had already inquired twice, and the sly look in old Samuel's eyes had vexed me and brought the colour to my cheeks.

I looked out of window; the waste bit was deserted; except that a Cochin China hen, followed by four pullets, stalked awkwardly across it—like raw recruits trying to fancy themselves soldiers; and an angry barking told me that Bijou, Madame's poodle, saw them, too, from the post which he always took up at breakfast-time in the sitting-room window. Yes, Madame and the Captain were safe at breakfast, and I could go off for my letter, and if I found it I should start at once on a long walk, and get rid of Captain Brand and any explanation till dinner-time.

He told me, yesterday evening, he could only stay a few days, and that then he was going away, perhaps for more than a year; it seems to me that the best way is to be quite civil and friendly, and then, when I get my father's letter, to write and tell Captain Brand that I can never look on myself as his wife, that I can never love him, and that I am engaged to Eugène, for I consider myself as much bound to him as if I had promised to be his wife, and I feel surer as time goes on that my father will take my part. And yet, while I put on my hat, there steals over me a dim and

mysterious dread, a something I cannot grasp or define in any shape, something as impalpable as the melancholy mist which for ever hovers over that grand, sad Dartmoor. I try to shape it into distinctness; the only approach to form is a shrinking from Eugène's letter, and yet an ever increasing desire to get it.

I look at myself in the little old-fashioned mirror with bevelled sides, which hangs in such a light that there is not a chance of seeing how one really appears in it. I make out that I am horribly pale, except my lips, which are intensely red, and my eyes, which are very dark and mournful. I start back; something, I cannot tell what, in my own face reminds me of Mrs. Dayrell. I laugh, and in an instant the weird, strained look is gone.

"What nonsense! how foolish and trifling I am! it is this quiet place, where there is nothing to think about but one-self, that has made me so fanciful."

I ran down stairs very fast, and then set off to the post-office. When one is puzzled with thoughts one does not choose to unravel—I mean reproving thoughts—I find a good run an excellent way of getting rid of them, and lately my conscience has been very troublesome, I shall grow morbid if I listen to it.

I was out of breath when I reached the post-office; an old woman was standing below the window. I did not much care to be seen outside asking for letters, so I went round and tapped at the open door of Samuel's office.

"Come in," he said, he never turned his head, but went on talking to Mrs. Treleaven. I knew her very well. She kept the "all" shop of the village, just beneath one of the tall elm-trees opposite the church. I peeped from behind the shelter of the window-curtain, and saw her hard face and obstinate grey eyes turned

fixedly on old Samuel. She put her hand behind her right ear.

"I don't hear rightly all as you's bin saying, but it seems a mossel onfair, Muster Morgan, as ye should find fault with Papists—you as goes and listens to a man dressed up in a white rag every Sabbath!" Here she gave a deep sigh.

I could see Samuel's profile; he bent his head suddenly, and crossed his hands meekly in front of him.

"My good woman, you should not judge; leave that to men. I gave chapel a fair turn, and now I does the same for the church. Everything as is lawful must have its turn, but Papists ain't lawful; them is blasphemious heathens."

I saw Mrs. Treleaven nod approval, but her voice was slightly sharpened when she spoke.

"You're right for once, Muster Morgan, heathen's the word to fit that tall, solemndressed Madame Angelick, as thay calls she; and she for to ask me to part with my blue junket-bowls, as have belonged to me and my great-grandmother afore me nigh upon two hunderd year!"

"I don't see harm in that. Thay's not much account to ee!" Samuel spoke mischievously.

"For why, Muster Morgan?" Mrs. Treleaven threw back her head with emphasis.

"Thay's always locked up out of sight; now, if Madame Angelick had'n, she'd maybe stick'n up, and make a show of thay."

"I locks thay up to keep thay from dust, and her would turn thay into dust-traps; is that yer meanin'?"

"If you choose to have it so. But I was thinkin', too, that here was a chance of turning a few shillings as don't come every day, and no soul the wiser."

I peeped again. Mrs. Treleaven's face had grown to look rigid, as if carved in wood.

"No soul the wiser! What o' that,

Samuel Morgan? Thay junket-bowls comed down to me from my great-grandmother, and how long her had thay is more than can be told. My grandchildren may sell thay, when I'm dead and gone, and have no power to stop such courses; but as thay comes to me so I leaves thay. Some day, maybe, I'll have a parlour too, and put thay out to be looked at as well as another. What for not, Samuel Morgan? I wish ye good day."

Her voice was full of wrath, and Samuel folded his hands softly.

"I never said contrairy, Mrs. Treleaven," he called after her. "There's one sure thing"—he turned suddenly to me—"there bean't a mossel o' use in trying to give counsel to a woman, unless you does it vicevarsy. Now, if I had ha' said, 'Don'tee sell they plates,' it's morally possible Deborah might ha' gone and sold thay—morally."

"Is there a letter for Miss Stewart?"
I had been feeling so glad that Samuel

was sitting facing the window, but he wheeled his stool round in an instant, and looked at me.

"There have been a letter, ma'am—a foreign letter—with a name of that sort, these three days, and I was thinkin it 'oodn't be claimed, so——"

"Give it me directly, please," I said; my face felt in a glow, but I could not help speaking impatiently. I wanted to make the prosy old man give me my treasure at once.

He half shut his eyes and smiled, and then he got up slowly and went to the letter-box, and unlocked it. At last I held the thin, slippery, precious letter; the writing told me it was Eugène's; but I did not look glad when I got it. I had had time to stiffen my face before Samuel turned round.

"Good morning."

I went away before he could speak.

Men, as a rule, I think, take much longer
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in getting their words ready than women do.

What a happiness that I had put the letter in my pocket! While I stood by the dried-up pump, hesitating which road to take, I saw Angélique mounting the slope from the brook. I pretended not to see her, and turned towards the road which led to the Cleave.

"Mademoiselle!"

I did not think Angélique could call so loud.

"Wait, if you please, one little moment."

Just then I longed to be a man, that I might say, "Confound your little moments!" Instead, I said, when she stood beside me, breathless with her hasty climb,

"It must be a very little one; I am off for a walk."

I spoke almost rudely; I was glowing with impatience to read my letter, and I thought she only wanted to fit on a new gown she is making for me.

There is something in Angélique which

soothes impatience. She does not look the least bit goody or reproving—that would have set all the remains of my patience fairly alight; but she smiles in her sweet, serene way, and says,

"Ah, it is not I who want Mademoiselle, it is Madame. She sends her love, and will Mademoiselle come to her as quickly as possible?"

I think for a moment.

"Have you been looking for me long, Angélique?"

"For a quarter of an hour, perhaps, and Madame has been in her room waiting, for I did not know that Mademoiselle had gone out."

I felt a little conscious, for I had avoided notice when I went out. I sighed. Of course I could not keep Madame waiting any longer.

"Allons!—in her room, is she? She will not keep me long, I daresay."

I stole a swift glance at Angélique; she

looked so unusually sad that I suspected she too had been told my story. I felt dogged and determined as I went slowly up to Madame's bed-chamber.

There was a projecting window at the end of the large room, and in the recess it made were set a small square writing-table and two basket-work easy-chairs—at least, they were meant to be easy; they always seemed to me too slippery to sit on. Madame La Peyre was seated in one of these chairs, and as soon as I had kissed her she pointed to the other. I had meant to stand, so as to shorten the interview; but something in Madame La Peyre's face controlled me into submission. I did not feel subdued; I was more intensely rebellious against this hateful marriage than I had ever been-more resolute that I would die sooner than be really Captain Brand's wife. But there was a seriousness in Madame La Peyre's face that was new to me, and that oppressed me with a dread of coming evil.

The foreboding of the morning came back, and sat heavily on my heart, brooding there with nerveless wings, like a bat in daylight.

"Gertrude, my dear child,"—this was a very formal beginning for Madame La Peyre—"Captain Brand has told me the relation in which he stands to thee."

It was a pity she stopped; before I had time to pull my impetuosity up short, it tugged at the rein and got free.

"What is that?" I said, flippantly, with a hot face, and eyes that I felt were flashing.

Madame La Peyre looked at me hastily, and then her dear old cheeks puckered into a decided attempt to cry; but she spoke again after a little waiting.

"Thou knowest what I mean, my child—that at thy mother's wish thou wert married to Captain Brand." She held up her hand to check me this time. "I wish thou hadst told me at once, Gertrude; I

should have acted differently. But I suppose "—she smiled in her usual sunny way —"thou wert shy about it. Well, thou hast an excellent husband—the most indulgent and considerate possible; he makes me smile with his consideration. I tell him he does not understand young girls."

"How does he show this consideration, Madame?"

I could not even try to be reasonable; it seemed to me absolutely wicked that my own friend should take Captain Brand's side against me. She looked at me in a very surprised way.

"Why, my dear child, he leaves thee free and uncontrolled; there are men who would think a few months' waiting quite sufficient."

I felt myself turn icy cold. I suppose I grew white. In a moment Madame La Peyre jumped up and put both arms round me.

"Ah, ciel! my angel; but I had no thought of this. What is it, my Gertrude, my well-beloved?"

She rested my head on her shoulder, and kissed me on both cheeks. At this I began to cry heartily. My anger and fear melted away together.

"I don't mean," I sobbed, "that Captain Brand is not kind; but indeed he is not my husband. I must love my husband, and I never—never—can—love—him."

"Yes, yes, ma petite, and when he is really thy husband thou wilt love him; there is no occasion for that now. He does not ask now for thy love, he leaves thee in peace; he does not even require that thou shouldest be called by his name."

I raised my head from her shoulder, and sat upright. If I did not protest, it seemed to me I was acknowledging myself married.

"Madame, will you please listen, and let me say all I want to say?" I gave a gasp, which frightened her, for she went and got her salts-bottle, and held it for me to smell at. "You know how young I am. I was much younger—much more like a child—before that night on board the Adelaide; I have never been the same since. My darling mother thought she was dying, and I thought so too, and I did not oppose her wish; but indeed I gave her no consent. I was so stunned with surprise and grief that I said what I was told to say—it all seemed a dream—and then, just at the end, I thought my mother died, and I have never been able to remember what happened."

"My poor darling child!"—her eyes were so full that she put her handkerchief to them—"it was too sudden, and thou wert too young, and then there was so much sadness afterwards. If it had all come to pass quietly and naturally, thou wouldest have been contented."

I looked up to see if she could be in earnest. Did she know nothing, then, of

love? Had her soul been always kept free from the sweet sad trouble which I knew now to be a woman's lawful portion? With me it had been feeling instead of knowledge, till I read Mr. Donald's poetrybooks; but I thought that, however sad it might be, it was life: mere existence without it levelled one with a butterfly or a bird.

I started as the thought came. Had not Mrs. Dayrell said that Madame La Peyre's nature was different from mine? Perhaps I should not be able to make her understand. I shook my head.

"I can only say the same thing, Madame—I must love my husband before I marry him, and I can never love Captain Brand. Love is a free feeling, it could never be an act of duty. That marriage was made without my free consent. You think I am wicked, perhaps, but this marriage makes me sometimes hate Captain Brand."

I stood upright, and clenched my hands nervously. Madame looked shocked, so shocked that she did not answer. She left me, and sat down in the chair opposite mine.

"My child, thou givest me pain. I do not think"—she spoke very coldly—"that Captain Brand knows how much dislike thou hast to this marriage."

"He knows I do not like him."

"He said to me that thou hadst a constrained and distant manner with him; but I told him that this was only natural and right at thy age, and—and, my dear,"—Madame La Peyre looked more decorous than I could have imagined possible—"I believe this conversation is unnecessary. It is true Captain Brand is thy husband, but he will not claim thee as his wife for more than a year; by that time thy feelings will have changed; all we have to think of is so to complete thy education that thou mayest be fit for thy new position when the time comes."

Her unsympathetic manner stopped me. I had been on the point of confessing my correspondence with Eugène, my certainty that my father would refuse his consent to the marriage with Captain Brand—all the plans and hopes which had become fixed resolutions since I reached Merdon. But that look of propriety warned me; instead of growing excited with the rush of impetuous feeling which a loving look or word would have created, I kept calm, and, being calm, could think.

How much wiser it was to keep quiet now, and when my father's letter came in support of my assertion, and when Captain Brand was safe at the other side of the world, I could tell Madame La Peyre frankly that I considered my marriage was no marriage, and that I never would be the wife of anyone unless I could be parted from Captain Brand.

My silence puzzled her; she leaned forward and put one hand gently on my cold fingers—I suppose the touch gave her a truer insight.

"We will not talk of this again, ma petite," she said, soothingly, "there is no need for either of us to remember it."

She smiled as sweetly, as brightly as ever. I kissed her, and then I went to my own room.

"No need to remember!"

I looked at myself again in the old mirror. How wan and drawn in my face was! and what dark circles had come round my eyes! the shadow of the morning was no shadow now, it was a living sorrow stamped into my heart.

"No need to remember," I sighed.

I must bear all my burden alone; there was no use in even trying to make sweet, kind Madame La Peyre understand me.

CHAPTER IV.

A TÊTE-À-TÊTE WITH CAPTAIN BRAND.

DO not know how long I had been sitting on the bank beyond the huge stepping-stones at the bottom of the Cleave. Dark grey masses piled one on another, leaving black unfilled spaces in which the boiling water sometimes churned and foamed, and then hurried on headlong to encounter fresh obstacles, and roar its way down the tree-shaded valley; or more awful yet when the water lay in still pools, terrible from the depths their darkness told of—the stepping-stones were wet and slippery—a single false step and I might plunge into one of these pools, and be

sucked under the stones, perhaps for ever, with no mourners except the huge over-hanging trees that made the place gloomy; and yet, though it was all new and strange to me, I felt no fear. I had heard of the stepping-stones as the wildest bit in the Cleave, and I felt pleased that I had come upon it unawares. I stepped across to the gloomy, deeply-shadowed bank on the farther side, thinking only of my letter. Actually the dangerous spot was delightful to me, as a safe place in which I could read Eugène's letter without fear of interruption.

I read my letter twice. How delicious it was! but I believe he will make me conceited. I did not know really that I was pretty till Eugène told me so—so often; he says in the letter that my eyes are like stars. The words thrill through me, I tremble as I sit there on the bank—Eugène loves me so very dearly. The letter is full of his feelings, and how dull he finds his studies.

and how he longs to be free, that he may come to England and be with me. There is a great deal that I do not understand, but which seems to me very beautiful, about the world and its trammels, and how true love may be known from false by its scorn for all observances and restraints that fetter feeling.

My face has grown hot while I have been reading. I wonder what Madame La Peyre would think of Eugène's letter. She would doubtless say that he ought not to write to me at all, but then Madame La Peyre considers that Captain Brand is my husband. So of course it is impossible that we can judge in the same way; I consider that I am quite free.

Dear Eugène, how I love you! Just as I am going to kiss the letter a slight sound startles me. I look across the torrent—Captain Brand is on the other side of the stepping-stones, and he is looking at me. I am very thankful that the stones are

between us, and that they are so slippery that even Captain Brand dares not cross them quickly. I put the letter in my pocket without any haste or confusion—as coolly as if it were my handkerchief. But I feel that my face is very red, and my heart is swinging like the pendulum of a tall clock; I am more stunned than flurried. This must surely cause a crisis in the dumb, smothered intercourse that goes on between me and Captain Brand. What will it lead to?

He has got across those dangerous stones more quickly than I thought possible. I cannot look up at him. I have an idea that when he is angry he is very rough and rude, and I do not want him to see the frightened look in my face. He seats himself beside me—in that masterful way which always makes me shrink from him.

"Are you better?" he says pleasantly. "I hope so—Angélique said you were not well,

and could not come down to breakfast, and when I went to ask you if you felt well enough to come out for a walk with me, I heard you had gone alone to the Cleave."

I felt vexed. How did anyone know which way I had gone?—do they watch me? In a sort of contradiction against Angélique and her mistress, I felt more tolerant towards Captain Brand.

"I am quite well, thank you." I smiled and ventured to look at him. Angry? I never saw him look so happy—his face was one kind smile.

A pang of remorse went through me; how unsuspecting he was, and how deceitful I was growing!—for I felt by instinct that, if I tried to keep him happy and pleased with me, he would forget about the letter: the uneasy sensation must have shown itself in my face.

"You were reading a letter, were you not?" he said.

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I would have given much to have been able to look at him, but I feared I might betray myself. I pretended not to hear, and bent down suddenly to one of the dark pools at our feet.

"Was that a fish? Look at it! Is it not awful to think of falling into one of those holes?"

"Yes,"—he spoke gravely—"it makes me feel nervous that you should have crossed them alone. I wish you would not do it again, my dear child. I can hardly tell you how unsafe they are."

Actually his voice trembled. I suppose it was the repulse I had met with in the morning from Madame La Peyre; but just then I longed to take Captain Brand's hand in mine, and ask him to release me, to be my friend instead of my husband, but the unconquerable fear I had of approaching the subject checked me.

"I did not think these holes were so dangerous till I sat here, and I saw how deep they are—indeed, I will not cross them alone again."

I spoke very gently—humbly even, for I felt guilty. I began to see that Captain Brand was unselfish.

"Thank you for your promise, my dear, dear child." He had taken my hand, and was holding it with a warm pressure between both his. I looked up in sudden fear and shrinking, and drew my hand away; it made me sad to see his face change. He really was handsome a minute ago, his blue eyes shone with affection, but I suppose he must see how I feel—all light and warmth faded—he looked hurt and disappointed.

I felt miserable to have made him unhappy. I can never help trying to make people bright and happy. I forgot all my alarm, and I pressed his hand gently.

"It is so very good of you to be so careful of me," I said softly, and I looked as affectionate as I could.

Captain Brand gave a little exclamation. I could not hear distinctly what he said, but he actually clasped both my hands tightly in his and kissed them—just as he did in the cabin of the *Eclair*.

I was so frightened that I nearly fell into the water. This is what makes it so difficult to get on with Captain Brand; I never can be sure of him; his general manner is calm and self-contained, and then at times he is so impetuous. I am sorry to appear cold and indifferent to him; but it is really his own fault; he must think I am hard and ungrateful; and yet directly I soften, or show him the least friendship, he does or says something to frighten me. He can have no real self-control; and, at his age, it is absurd for a man to be impulsive.

I do not know how I looked; I felt horribly shy and upset. But he seemed ashamed of his own behaviour. He let my hands drop suddenly, and got up, and went away from me farther down the bank; I am very glad he has gone. After all, what has

happened is best; if I had not been kind to him, and made him forget everything, he might have asked questions about that letter, but I am not happy.

"Oh, Eugène," I say to myself, "what a dear price I have paid for it! I feel disgraced, I have acted a falsehood, and now how much more deceit and contrivance shall I have to undergo before all is ended?"

But I cannot give up the hope of Eugène's letters. I did not know, till I read this one, how much delight a letter can give. Ah, how much!

I am not left alone long with mythoughts. Captain Brand comes back, and sits down again, not so near me this time. I am very glad of this; I feel more at my ease, and calculate the distance between us; and I feel sure he cannot reach my hand from where he sits. It seems to me to be a kind of treason to Eugène to let anyone kiss my hand; however it is not likely that Captain Brand can care much to kiss

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it; he will probably kiss Madame La Peyre's hand when he goes away.

"Gertrude,"—I start; I never can get reconciled to hearing him call me by my name—"I want to tell you my plans, if you will kindly listen."

I try to look profoundly dutiful, but I move a little farther off. Captain Brand shades his face with one of his large brown hands.

"I am going to the United States after I leave you. If possible, I shall run down and take a look at you when I return, and then I hope to sail again."

"When shall you come back?"

I really only ask for the sake of saying something, and because it is polite to seem a little interested; but Captain Brand takes his hand from his face and looks very much pleased.

"I shall be back from America soon after Christmas, though this is not quite certain; but when I sail again, after that, I shall probably be away a year or more."

I sigh with a feeling of intense relief. Before the end of that year I hope some means will have been found to set me free.

"You will write to me while I am in America," he says, as if it were settled, not as if he were asking a favour.

But I am resolved to be as honest as I can; I feel less shy of him now.

"Oh, please don't ask me to write; you cannot think how I dislike the idea of it.

Madame La Peyre will write—I will send you a message in the letter. Won't that do?"

I look up in a laughing, coaxing way; but he is quite grave, and I see his mouth twitch.

"Well,"—he waits a little before he speaks—"we will not argue about it; I will write to you, and trust that you will change your mind and be kind enough to answer my letter. You may be sure that everything—every little thing—relating to you interests me. You must try to believe this, for it is simple truth. You can tell

me your thoughts, tell me about your daily life—about your walks. I am afraid there is not much to amuse you here."

"Oh, yes; indeed, I like Merdon. And I have some friends——"

Captain Brand looks grave at once, and he gets up.

"Shall I help you across the steppingstones?" he says, and he holds out his hand.

This is, I suppose, an intimation that our conference is over. I do not think he really cares about me, or he would stay longer when he comes, and he would care more to talk to me alone. But I am very glad, not because I actually dislike talking to him; I believe I like the excitement it gives me, and there is something dignified about him which I can't help admiring, even when I am most angry, and he is always so simple and manly in all he says; but all the time I am with him I am tormented by a shrinking dread that he is going to speak of that dreadful marriage.

We are safe over the stepping-stones

—he holds my hands with such a strong, helpful grasp—and then I go on in front with a reprieved feeling at my heart. I scramble after ferns and mosses, and, to my joy, Captain Brand does not try to overtake me, except once, when I climb a steep bit of rock, then I find him beside me in an instant, helping me as carefully as if I were a child.

"Thank you." I look up in his face, and laugh. "You don't seem to have much opinion of my climbing powers; but I must learn to be sure-footed, I shall not have you to help me always."

I am sure I heard him sigh again; and yet he certainly does not seem to care about being much with me; I cannot understand him.

"Why does not Madame La Peyre's maid take walks with you?" he says; "it is unsafe for you to go scrambling about in this wild place alone. Suppose you fell again and sprained your ankle. You might lie suffering for hours perhaps before any help

came. I shall speak to Madame La Peyre about it."

"Merci, Monsieur," I make a deep curtsey; "then you really think I am still a child, and still want a nursemaid. Why, poor dear Angélique would infallibly break her legs if she came down among the rocks here, and then, how should I ever get her home? If I really want a companion, I will find something younger and more amusing than Angélique, thank you."

How foolish I am to tease and provoke him! I am so frightened at my own daring that I dart off, and never stop till I have reached the top of the ridge. To my joy a party of people come straggling up the rocky field, tourists from Torquay or Exeter, who are seeing Merdon and its neighbourhood; but they linger so long about the field that I feel they are an answer to Captain Brand's fears. No one could call the Cleave solitary to-day.

CHAPTER V.

"MY LOVE SHE'S BUT A LASSIE YET."

 Γ WAS quite out of breath by the time Ireached the farm-house. I walked fast on purpose; not to avoid Captain Brand, I begin to like him—as a friend; he is so different from everyone else, and I cannot make him out. I like this: a reserved man is much more interesting than a man who talks constantly about himself, he is more dignified too. have walked on so fast, because I wanted to see if Captain Brand would not overtake me, and he has not tried to do it; he has even let me open the gates for myself. He is the strangest, most difficult man to understand that ever lived. For just that instant, while he held my hands—I blush

while I think of it—I almost feared he might be in love with me; but this is impossible. He is to go away very early to-morrow, and he may not come back for several months. If he were ever so little in love with me, he would have been eager not to lose a minute's chance of talking to me alone. If Eugène had had the opportunity of walking alone with me through that delicious lane and the wood, he would have been greedy of every minute. Dearest Eugène! I wonder why he is so dear. have seen very little of him. Ah, but then he is young, and he is so handsome, and so altogether charming. I take his letter out of my pocket and kiss it. I sit down on my bed and rest while I read the letter again. I am a little surprised at myself. I have this letter—far more delightful than I had thought a letter could have been—and yet I am thinking again of Captain Brand. In my heart, though I pretend not to be so, I am a little disappointed that he is so indifferent. And yet when I

consider his conduct from the beginning, with just a few exceptions, he has always been cold and indifferent to me. I cannot make out why he wished to marry me.

When I go downstairs, I find Madame La Peyre and Captain Brand sitting in the window-seat, talking so earnestly that they give a little start as I come in. Something in Captain Brand's pleasant smile is reassuring. I have always wished so much for a brother, and I think he looks very brotherly just now.

"What are you two plotting," I say saucily, and I pinch Madame La Peyre's soft white hand; for the moment I entirely forget her lecture; I believe Eugène's letter has made me too happy to remember anything unpleasant.

"We are not plotting, Gertrude." Madame La Peyre can always be easy and graceful in an instant. "Thy kind friend"—she smiles at the Captain—"was making all sorts of arrangements for thy comfort—that is all."

This makes me feel uncomfortable; but before I can get vexed, Captain Brand says—

"No, Madame, that is more than I deserve; I was only agreeing with your suggestions. I am such an ignorant guardian, and you are so kind in helping me to a knowledge of my duties; when I fail my ward must forgive me."

There is a pleading expression in his eyes—at least I think so.

"You are an excellent guardian, and I am quite contented."

I look at him more frankly than I have done yet. I want him to know that I do like him as a friend, though I have been often so disagreeable. Captain Brand has certainly a beautiful smile; his eyes and his lips smile at the same time.

"Then we are good friends," he laughs; and then he says with a sigh, "I wish I had a week to spare down here."

"Don't wish that," I say mischievously, "I should quarrel with you six times a day."

He gets up and stands in front of me with such an admiring glance that I look away quickly, and I meet Madame La Peyre's eyes, full of wonder. This sobers me—takes me back in an instant to my misery in Madame La Peyre's bed-room. Captain Brand sees my sadness; but, instead of turning away and avoiding me in his usual unaccountable way, he speaks like a kind elder brother who wants to comfort.

"I should like to hear you sing before I go; shall I open the piano?"

What has come to Captain Brand, and what has come to me? He speaks to me as if he were my equal, and I do not resent it. I give him a grateful look as I go to the piano. I do not at all understand myself, or why I am behaving in this way.

"Sing—what shall I sing? I have only Mrs. Dayrell's music to choose from."

"Is that all? you must have some music of your own; you have only to write to one

of the London music-shops, and they will send you anything; or, if you write to Exeter, they will manage it for you; or better still, will you give me a list, and I will see about it to-morrow."

"Oh, no, thank you; I will write myself."

I flush at the idea of accepting any gift from Captain Brand. I like him better than I ever liked him before this evening, and I consider him my friend; but I cannot put myself under any obligation to him.

I turn the leaves of a music-book carelessly. It is full of old songs. Captain Brand looks over my shoulder.

"Will you sing this one?"

He lays his brown hand on a page. It is "My love she's but a lassie yet." I feel myself crimson in an instant, but I will not smile. I suppose Captain Brand wants to tease me for my bad behaviour in France. But he shall not think I understand him.

"Yes," I answer; and I sing the song very quietly, without any of the sauciness I long to put into the words.

Captain Brand does not even thank me; he moves back to the window, and looks out.

- "Gertrude has a charming voice," Madame says.
- "Yes, Madame;" and then I hear a distinct sigh. What is there in my singing to make this unaccountable man sigh? I wish he would not sigh so much about nothing. What a sphynx he is!

But Angélique comes with dinner, and the evening goes so fast that bed-time seems to arrive directly.

"I will say 'good-bye' to-night," Captain Brand says, "I must be up and away very early."

I am going to say, "Oh, no; I shall see you again. I shall get up and see you off." But I look at him; and, somehow,
I hold my tongue. If he wanted to see you. II.

me again he would ask me to get up to-morrow. He holds my hand, and looks so kind, that I think, if alone with him, I could confess about Eugène and the letter, and get rid of all this hateful deceit.

Madame is surely a witch.

"You have, perhaps, some words to say to Gertrude, Monsieur le Capitaine."

She gets up to go away. Captain Brand goes after her quickly.

"No, indeed, Madame, pray do not go. I have only to ask her to write to me; at least to be good enough to answer my letters." Then he turns to me—"And now, good-bye, my dear child; God bless you!"

He takes my hands in both his, but he only presses them gently, and I give him a hearty grasp in return.

"Good-bye; I am sorry you are going."

As soon as I reach my little room, I shut fast the door of communication into Madame La Peyre's chamber. When I do this, Angélique understands that I do not

want her. I feel so excited with my own thoughts that I must be alone to-night.

I am excited, and I am angry with myself. Why, when Madame La Peyre gave me this chance, did I not say I wished to speak to Captain Brand alone, and then tell him the truth. I did try to speak; but that strange shyness, which I never felt with anyone but Captain Brand, held me back. It must be the miserable remembrance of the marriage that causes this shyness. But I will conquer it; I will get up very early to-morrow, and tell him everything.

CHAPTER VI.

VISITORS.

I OVERSLEPT myself. I had meant to wake at five o'clock, but it was six when I peeped out of the window, roused by the barking of the dogs. I knew that their barking was caused by Captain Brand's departure, as he was to start at six o'clock.

By the time I am ready to go downstairs, I decide that it is a good thing I have overslept myself. It is much better to wait the arrival of my father's letter; when that comes I will write to Captain Brand, and tell him everything. He is so really good and kind that he will not reuse to set me free. I begin to like him so much, and yet I could never love him. Surely any sensible man would listen to a girl who told him this.

I was very silent during breakfast, and so was Madame La Peyre. Just as she was leaving the room, she said,

"Thou canst go and see Madame Dayrell to-day, Gertrude, but do not go often. I wished thee not to go during Captain Brand's visit; and it will be better, my dear, not to speak of thy marriage to her."

Madame La Peyre went away so quickly that I could not answer; but, indeed, I had no words ready. That word "marriage," spoken by Madame La Peyre, made my trouble real again, and destroyed the web of hope I had been weaving.

I sat, wearily picturing my future life. I would never be Captain Brand's wife—that was a settled determination—no, not if I had to run away, and spend all my days in efforts to escape him; and

then, why I do not know, all my misery seemed to roll away like a cloud; perhaps it was that the sun was shining gloriously, making the satin holly-leaves look like little mirrors of brightness.

"I will not think of it any more"—and I went up to my room to get my hat—"I will think of my father; and I am sure Captain Brand will be glad to break an engagement with a girl who does not love him, and whom he does not love; if I can keep this marriage out of my head, I am really happy here, much happier with dear Madame La Peyre than I was at home, when I was always craving for love, and sympathy, and escape from that ugly old school-room."

I remember, even in those days which seem so far off now, that I certainly was not contented; I wanted to know more of my mother, to be with her, and to ask her about thoughts which I could not tell to my governess or my sisters. But till her

illness began on board ship, I always felt strange and timid with my mother. Ah! if I only had her now! When I think of her, it seems to me I have rather an idea of what she might have been than a real memory of her. Oh! mother, darling, if ever I am blessed with a child, no nurse or governess shall ever come between me and my child's confidence; it shall never puzzle over the mysteries of life as I have puzzled.

Here I smile at my own exaggeration. With the exception of that trouble which I have resolved to put out of my thoughts, and the great sorrow I have at times for my mother, life seems to me here, at Merdon, much brighter and pleasanter than I had imagined it. I have friends who are kind to me, and there are sweet, bright Madame La Peyre, and Angélique, who is always gentle and kind, and so good that only to talk to her makes me feel better. Everyone loves me; even the village child-

ren flock round me if I appear in the village during play-hours. Old Samuel is crossgrained, but then his quaintness amuses me; he is like a gnarled oak-stump, and I do not think he means any harm. Mrs. Dayrell is different—ah, Mrs. Dayrell makes the chief shadow in my life; I cannot really love her; I do not often see her, but when I do, she always fascinates me; and then, when I am deeply interested, and I am pitying her with my whole heart, and ready to love her, she stings like a nettle; she is so out of harmony with all . else here that my visits are painful to look back on. I will make Angélique tell me why Mrs. Dayrell is so unhappy, whether she has a real trouble, or whether she makes one for herself by her discontent.

There is a knock at the door of my room—my reflections are ended. Angélique comes in smiling.

"Mademoiselle, there are some visitors for you; Madame Tracey and her daughters are returned from their voyage, and they come to make the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Stewart."

I smiled. I have heard that the Vicar's family have been spending the Autumn in Switzerland, which, to me, seems a puny voyage enough, but I am pleased with the hope of getting young companions.

I found them all in the "parlour," as the mistress of the house calls it, with Madame La Peyre. Mrs. Tracey came forward and shook hands with me.

I like her face, but not her manner. She is a small slender woman, with a delicate skin, and regular features, and blue eyes; they are pretty without being sweet. She reminds me of that little garden-flower Nemophila—fair to the eye, but wholly without sentiment or fragrance. The girls are not like their mother; they are tall and large-boned—showy-looking, I suppose they would be called; the eldest, Georgiana, has dark eyes and heavy dark

eyebrows, and such black hair, but she looks haughty, she holds her head so stiffly. Angelina, or Lina, as they call the other, looks much nicer; she has soft eyes, I cannot tell of what colour, her white eyelids droop heavily over them, and she has long light eyelashes; her light hair is wavy and pretty; she is not so pale as her sister is, and there is a pretty dimple in one of her cheeks, which makes me think she can be more amusing than she shows herself in this visit.

But I like both the girls better than I like their mother, because they do not make such professions of delight. How can Mrs. Tracey know all in a minute that she is charmed with me? She is pretty, but I am afraid she must be silly. Also, why need she say that she has often heard of my great-grandfather, Lord Erlingham? She has a great deal of graceful, pleasant manner, but still I do not care for her. I am relieved when she says,

"Why should not these dear girls go for a little walk, Madame, while you and I chat about Switzerland?"

I am off to get my hat before anyone answers, and Lina at any rate looks pleased when I come down ready to start. I feel a little shy of these young ladies as I walk between them, and remark the style of their dress and their hair; the arrangement is ugly, but I suppose it is fashionable; I have gone on doing mine just the same way I did in Van Diemen's Land, nearly a year ago -only long loose plaits, coiled round and round the back of my head; but this arrangement is quite different, the hair droops low in the neck, and makes the head look very wide; their dress is quiet enough in colour, but still it is studied, and there is a great deal of trimming about it, and on their grey hats. The eldest sister looks at me as soon as we are in the path leading to the village.

"Do you not find Merdon dreadfully

dull?" She speaks kindly, and, I think, pityingly, but I am not in a pugnacious mood this morning. I am disposed to rejoice in the prospect of companionship.

"No, not yet, it is all new to me. I have been so long on board ship, and travelling, that I delight in the quiet, and all the country sights and sounds: it is so different from Tasmania.

"You will soon lose many of these," says Lina—she lisps, but it sounds very pretty. I am sure I shall like her—I would kiss her, if she gave me the least excuse—"why, it is quite chilly already," she gives a little shiver; "and look how bare the trees are already. Merdon always seems extra-melancholy to me with that ceaseless sound of falling leaves."

"I hardly notice it; you see the changing colour on the trees has been to me something glorious. We have so few beautiful trees, and they do not take these delicate tints; but still, even when all the leaves are gone, nothing can alter the sunsets in the Cleave, or the exquisite tints on the rocks there."

"That is an artistic sentiment. I am afraid my sister and I are not artists," says Georgiana, coldly, and she gives a little emphasis, as if there were something objectionable in the word; "we shrink from dulness, and we find Merdon quite a buried-alive residence—there is so little society."

I look at her in surprise; though she is so tall, we are nearly of a height. She is frowning hard with those heavy black eyebrows.

"But I should have thought you knew everyone in the village, from old Samuel upwards. You know Mr. Donald and Mr. Newton, of course?" I say this rather slyly, because Mr. Newton has talked to me about the Traceys, and said they were conceited and spoiled; I feel rather deceitful in putting this as a question. The

sisters exchange looks, and then Georgiana smiles in a very pitying way indeed.

"We know Mr. Newton, of course—he owns the land here, and he is a very charming person, a very old friend of ours; but Mr. Donald is not one of our friends, he is only Mr. Newton's tutor. You do not know that, perhaps?"

I also smile. With all her fashion and her grand manner, how small she is! Plainly to her a gentleman is made by his position, not by his behaviour. I am sure Lina must be wiser, and I turn to her.

"Yes, Mr. Donald told me so himself. I like him extremely, he has been so very kind to me—lending me books, and directing my reading."

They both seem to think this amusing.

"Well," Lina laughs, "that would be quite in his way, I fancy—he looks just like a schoolmaster, though when mamma proposed that he should give us German lessons he refused to do so, without giving

any reason. Very foolish and stuck-up, was it not?"

"I do not find him so." I feel vexed with myself for speaking warmly, but I cannot help it. It is not so much what the Miss Traceys said, but the manner of saying it—as if Mr. Donald was some one of whom it is hardly seemly to talk at all. "I think him clever and interesting to talk to."

"Really!" Georgiana shows her white, firm teeth in a most elaborate smile, "I have never talked much to Mr. Donald, so I cannot presume to judge. I fancy it is very difficult to judge people of that kind—one can never admit them to the familiarity necessary for easy intercourse. With people of his own class, I daresay Mr. Donald is a very good sort of person."

"I do not understand"—my eyes are very mocking, I fancy, for Lina says, in haste.

"No, of course you do not understand,

dear Miss Stewart; Georgiana is so terribly downright. Mamma often tells her so."

This was said in a low voice, and it shocked me—it seemed to me household treason that Lina should speak of her sister's faults. She went on in her usual tone:

"Certainly Mr. Donald is a university man, and has associated with gentlemen, and so on,"—I fancied Lina had a half-conscious look in her eyes,—"but he has no position, of course—he is received merely as Mr. Newton's tutor. Have you seen Mr. Newton's horses?" she went on. "They are such loves!"

"Yes; I am going to ride one of them next week; he offered to lend me one."

I saw that the sisters again exchanged looks, and Lina left off smiling.

"Do you see much of Mr. Newton!" Georgiana really spoke as if she thought me a child.

"Oh! yes; I see him most days," I said,

carelessly. "I shall miss him when he goes."

"I don't know what we shall do without him," Lina sighed, "he is so clever, so remarkable in all ways—so very much thought of by everyone."

The spirit of contradiction got the better of me.

"He is very good-natured and amusing, but I had no idea anyone could consider him remarkable or clever. Perhaps you will think it a strange idea, but I imagine, if he were not the owner of all this land, he would not be much thought of, he is so like anybody else."

Georgiana smiled.

"I see we shall not agree about people," she said, "but probably when you have been a little longer in England you will think as we do. I confess that I like a person to be like other people, and not to do anything eccentric or original. Mamma always says this is bad tone; it does for geniuses, and that kind of uncomfortable people, who you. II.

almost always rise from the ranks, and like to be conspicuous, and have to work for their bread; but I assure you anything original or different from society in general is considered ill-bred; in England one has to be guided so much by what other people do, and say, and think; it is the only safe rule."

"Yes,"—Lina's sweet lisping voice came like a faint echo—"I believe there is nothing gentlemen dislike so much as a girl who thinks for herself."

I could hardly help laughing.

"Well," I said, "I suppose there is the same safe rule everywhere; only don't you think that, unless there were sometimes these original people, the world would grow very dull? But where shall we go for a walk? I will go where you like. The country is almost all new to me."

They took me through the village, past the turning to the Cleave, past some wooden cottages, with a few broken steps leading up to the porches; over one of these porches straggled a creeping plant, mixed with honeysuckle, still in blossom; the door was open, it led direct into the room, and I could not help looking in as we passed by. The open fireplace had a short pink checked curtain hanging from the mantel-shelf, and two benches on each side of the fireless hearth; but my eyes fastened on the window, beyond which, framed in an exquisite landscape of many-coloured hills, behind its row of scarlet geraniums and fuchsias.

"How fond your cottagers seem of flowers!" I said; "I see them everywhere."

"Yes;" Georgiana holds her head very stiffly when she speaks, "but you only see common flowers down here; at Exeter, now, or in London, you see flowers really worth looking at—orchids, and that kind of hot-house things."

"I love all flowers."

We are past the cottages and beside the

brook again, which has threaded its way upwards, or, I suppose, downwards, and borders the side of the road, hedged in by sedges and water-plants; in and out of these tiny active fish are darting merrily, chasing one another, and sometimes leaping up in pursuit of some rash fly buzzing too thirstily near. Among the sedges hang jong green seed-pods; some of these have burst, and show bright scarlet seeds. Within, below, almost in the water, a little blue flower has wreathed itself amid the flags. I am just going to point out the exquisite contrast it makes amongst the tender green of the sedges, but I remember Georgiana's admonitions, and point to the fish instead.

"I suppose they are good to eat?"

"Oh yes, delicious; I wonder—" Lina speaks mischievously—"you have not had some sent you from the Park; we get basketfuls from Mr. Newton."

But I am resolved not to argue any more with my new companions—it can do

no good; and very soon they are telling me all about Switzerland and their adventures; these last they evidently consider more interesting than any of the places they have visited—in fact, it appears to me that the number of fresh acquaintances made in the course of each tour is the chief point of interest in it.

However, my new friends amuse me, and we walk on, talking, till I find they have brought me home by another way, which leads to our house without passing through the village again, still following the winding in and out curves of the brook.

- "If you will wait for me," Georgiana says, "I have a message to leave here."
- "Do you visit any of these cottages?" I ask Lina.
- "Oh yes; there are some dear old women we go and see, and we teach in the school; perhaps you would like to teach too?"
- "No, thank you. I should not know the way."

I felt shy and awed, and ashamed. Perhaps I had been harsh and hasty in thinking these girls silly; they knew more than I did if they knew how to talk to poor people in cottages, and teach school children. I am afraid I should only be shy with the first, and teach the last to get into mischief.

While we stood waiting, we saw Mrs. Tracey coming to meet us.

"I hope you have had a pleasant walk?"

Mrs. Tracey (though she has two grownup daughters) is still a very pretty woman
when she smiles, and her manner is gentle
and caressing, but I feel constrained by
it; she is too courteous, too much pleased
with me. I am afraid I am not amiable.
I shall ask Angélique what she thinks
of Mrs. Tracey. I respect Angélique's
opinion, because she never speaks ill of
anyone.

I said good-bye to my new friends, but I did not go indoors at once; they had left me at the corner of the lane leading to the farm-house, and I stood there—I was thinking so much of our talk.

When I lived at home I used sometimes to hear it said that fashion and position are necessaries of life. I believe if Captain Brand had been in the navy, or accustomed to society, and moving among fashionable people, I might have tried to think of him as my husband—I mean, of course, before I saw Eugène; now, all that is over. I ask myself what has come to me. Why am I so changed? I receive Mr. Donald as an equal. I even look up to him, and think him much more cultivated than Mr. Newton, and in this last visit I have not felt that Captain Brand is my inferior, I think of him as my friend. What-who has caused this? It is not Madame La Peyre—she is an old aristocrat, I can see. She, I am sure, prefers Mr. Newton to Mr. Donald. Is it that, since I have been tossed about in the world, I have coarsened?

—or is it this marriage which has made me less refined already?

My cheeks glow; I feel the tips of my ears burn; then actually I have felt contradictory with these girls, Georgiana and Lina, because they are more feminine, more really womanly than I am. And yet, no—conventionality is not, cannot be, real propriety; it cannot be right to look down on such a man as Mr. Donald, to think of him as an inferior. Oh, what a puzzle life is! and who have I to guide me? No one I can lean on or trust.

I look towards the house. Angélique is standing in the yard with a troop of half-grown chickens round her feet. Near her head, almost as if they meant to flutter on her shoulder, some white pigeons flit about. I have noticed, before this, how all the mute creatures, as well as the little children, love Angélique; perhaps her look of serene content wins them. I have never heard her laugh heartily, but she almost

always smiles. She looks most serious, I fancy, as she passes the door of Mrs. Dayrell's room, then a shadow falls across the calm sweetness of her face; and yet I think Angélique loves the poor haughty woman. I must learn her story. I may go and see her, now Captain Brand has gone.

CHAPTER VII.

TIME PASSES.

IT is Winter; more than two months since Captain Brand went away! I have not heard again from Eugène, and I begin to weary of his silence. Christmas will be here soon, and it is very cold. Cold weather seems strange at this time of year. Madame La Peyre shivers and stays by the fire-side, but I rejoice in the frost. It has been very dull lately, for the Traceys have been paying country visits, and Mr. Newton and Mr. Donald have been away ever so long. I have taken some pleasant walks with Angélique, for Madame La Peyre proposed this arrange-

ment after her talk with Captain Brand, and I like it. I have grown fond of listening to Angélique's stories; she tells me delightful old Norman legends; and I am very fond of her. I am quite anxious to go back to Château Fontaine, and explore the neighbourhood with her. I shall see everything with new eyes. There is a wonderful ruined monastery, a few miles from the Château, and all along the Seine, she says, there are ruins and picturesque old places; but I do not know when we shall get back to Normandy, for Mrs. Dayrell has been very ill lately. I rarely see her, and when I do she cannot hold a conversation, because of her cough. She looks more weird and hectic than ever, and if she speaks she always says something bitter and contradictory.

I was thinking much about her as Angélique and I walked briskly along the high-road; even I, with all my love of climbing, shrank from the rocks in the Cleave since this hard frost had set in. On the left the wind came whistling through an ash wood, and the bare branches groaned and rattled as if they felt the cold, and the need of shelter from it. A robin sat perched on the long arm of a blackberry bush that had straggled to the top of the hedge; the little bright-eyed bird was singing heartily; on the right the fields sloped down to the frozen brook that lay silent and imprisoned at the foot of the steep hills rising from its opposite bank.

"Angélique,"—I spoke so suddenly out of the midst of my reverie that she started —" why is Mrs. Dayrell always cross and unhappy?"

Angélique's smile faded; I think she was really pained to hear me speak so unkindly.

"Mademoiselle is not pitiful this morning; the poor Madame scarcely ever sleeps; I hear her cough, cough, cough, all through the night; and, Mademoiselle, the

dark hours are so much longer than the light hours to persons who suffer."

"But, Angélique, if you hear Madame cough all through the night, you must lie awake too, and yet you are not cross."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, but it is different to lie awake and think of the suffering of another, and to suffer one's self; one is not fevered and distracted, and one has one's mind more tranquil. Ah, I pray that it may not be laid on Mademoiselle, to suffer as Madame suffers."

It is very rare for Angélique to preach, and I generally tease her if she does, and then feel sorry afterwards.

"Angélique, I want to know why you always connect me with Mrs. Dayrell; what likeness can there be between us?"

"Pardon, I see a certain likeness, Mademoiselle." Angélique spoke with unusual quickness. "I knew Madame when she was as young as Mademoiselle is." She gave a deep sigh. "Ah, she used to be so gay, so beautiful!" She sighed again.

"What has changed her?" I said abruptly, and then I felt as if I were inquisitive.

Angélique looked puzzled; either she did not know, or else she was unwilling to . answer my question.

"It is a very sad history, Mademoiselle," she said, at last. "I should not like to tell it till I have asked Madame's permission."

I felt disappointed; for I guessed that Madame La Peyre would refuse permission, as she always tries to put hindrances between me and Mrs. Dayrell.

At this instant I heard the sound of a fast trotting horse; Angélique started and bent eagerly forward. You may walk for days about Merdon, and very seldom meet a wayfarer in the wooded roads which screen you completely from view of the fields, and since all my friends departed this isolation had been complete, so that this fast trot-trot—trot-trot, gave me a sort of Robinson Crusoe sensation.

I had not long to wait. The road wound

in and out in such sudden turns that our first sight of the horsemen was when he was close beside us. It was Mr. Donald. He pulled up the moment he saw us, and was off his horse instantly; he turned and walked beside me, holding the bridle in his hand. I was very glad to see him, but he looked delighted. I thought he was quite foolish to show his feeling so plainly, and yet I liked him to be glad.

After our first greetings, I said, "How is Mr. Newton—is he with you?"

He was grave in an instant.

"He started long before I did—he must have reached the Park some hours ago. We have ridden over from Exeter."

He walked on in silence.

Whatever has come to him—he used to have so much more conversation than Mr. Newton had. Angélique dropped a few steps behind, but she was still near enough to hear all we said.

"I think we had better turn back," I

said; "if you have ridden fron Exeter, your horse must be tired."

"Yes," said Mr. Donald with a start, "perhaps we had."

I am no doubt ungrateful, but if I think a person likes me I am always inclined to teaze; however, I was lenient to Mr. Donald, though I wished he would show his liking by being amusing—but he walked along in utter silence.

"Where have you been?" I asked at last.

"We slept in London on Monday, and then came on here." He looked at me with widely-opened eyes, as if he did not understand exactly what I was talking about.

I laughed. "I mean where have you been all these weeks?"

"Yes, I see"—Mr. Donald looked a little confused; "we have been away a very long time, it seemed as if we should never get to Merdon again; we have been to Genoa

and to Milan, and we crossed the Alps, and then we visited several French towns, and ended in Paris. Has the time seemed so very long to you?" he said eagerly.

I tried hard not to laugh, but there was something so helpless and anxious in his question that I felt mischievous, and I laughed out.

"It ought to have been much longer to me than to you, ought it not? I have stayed here in Merdon quite quietly, with no one outside the house to amuse me but old Samuel at the post-office, and yet you see I am alive."

Instead of joining in my laugh, he looked grave and ill at ease; so serious and altogether old-looking that I felt as if he were my tutor instead of being Frank Newton's.

"I have missed our readings very much."
I tried to speak kindly. I cannot bear anyone to be cross with me.

"Have you really?" and again Mr. Donald beamed over with delight. This you. II.

was absurd, because he used to be very calm and collected about these readings.

"When shall we begin them again?" I asked this to see whether his delight was genuine, or whether it would fade when its reality was tried.

"May I come to-morrow?"

"Yes—I have nothing special to do—you can come if you like—"

As I spoke we reached a turn in the road which led up to the Park.

"Thank you, I shall be so glad," he said; and then he added quite in his usual quiet voice, "I must leave you here—good-bye."

Angélique came nearer as soon as he was gone—but she did not speak. My own thoughts, I hardly know why, were not satisfactory. I grew impatient of her silence.

"Angélique, why don't you speak? I believe you are longing to scold me."

Angélique gave me a quiet half-comic look.

- "Why does Mademoiselle suppose that I so wish?"
- "Because I laughed at Mr. Donald, who is of course to be respected, as he is so much older than I am."
- "Mademoiselle, if I wished to say something, it would not be because Mademoiselle had laughed. That might be perhaps what will you?—a little uncourteous for a young lady, but it would not have been wrong."
- "Wrong!" the colour flew over my face, and I felt that my voice was growing vexed. "My dear Angélique, I did not know I was as guilty as that—pray let me hear this wrong-doing."

There was a little pain in Angélique's face, but no anger.

"Mademoiselle will pardon me, but I think as Mademoiselle is so young, and her marriage is not known, she should be careful how she speaks to gentlemen."

I stopped short in the road. I did not

dare to speak, I was too angry. I longed to tell her I was not married, but then this would upset all the little plan I meant to carry out when my father's letter arrived.

My silence did not seem to frighten Angélique; she made no excuse for her words, but stood silent beside me.

- "I don't know what you mean," I said at last very haughtily; and then the sight of that quiet, saddened face made me feel ashamed.
- "I am sorry to vex Mademoiselle, but it is that her manner may deceive Monsieur Donald, and he is ignorant that she is married."

I lost all control.

- "Who told you I was married?"
- "Madame told me so." Angélique looked really surprised and troubled. I felt quite glad to have upset her equanimity at last.
- "And did Madame tell you the circumstances?"

- "Yes, Mademoiselle."
- "There was no occasion for her to do so." I spoke haughtily. "But as you have been told, you must see that it was a mistake; you must know very well that I am just as free as if I had never been married, and that I do not—cannot consider that Captain Brand is my husband."
- "Mademoiselle may not think so—but Monsieur le Capitaine is her husband nevertheless."
- "Nonsense, Angélique!" I could hardly keep from stamping my foot. "A marriage on board ship is not at all the same as in a church. Suppose we both agree to get this marriage set aside; suppose I do not care for Captain Brand."

I stopped—silenced by the change in her face—she looked horror-struck.

"Mademoiselle," she spoke simply, but very solemnly, "a marriage by a priest may not be broken—it is the ordinance of God."

I could not answer a word. I walked on

dumb, but not subdued—and yet a cold, dead weight had fallen on my heart. I had never thought of my marriage in this light before.

CHAPTER VIII.

MY TWO LETTERS.

COULD not sleep all night, and for the first time I realised some of Mrs. Dayrell's suffering, while I listened to the incessant cough—cough—cough—that sounded through the stillness, and that surely must have shaken the bed on which she lay. But it was not her cough that kept me awake; that only chimed in with my own tormenting thoughts—thoughts that would not go away. Madame La Peyre and Angélique were the only women who knew my secret, and they both gave the same unhesitating opinion about the marriage. For the first time since I left Château Fontaine,

a terribly real feeling of dread oppressed me, seemed to grasp my heart, and hold me in check as if it were some giant.

What was, I after all? Only a girl, not yet seventeen—old for my age, perhaps, but with very little knowledge of the ways and customs of real life—for I had begun to feel that these are not quite the same as the mere restraints of society. Had I been wrong all this time, trusting in my own ignorance and self-will? Were Madame La Peyre and Angélique right?—was Captain Brand really my husband? No; impossible!—there was no justice in the thought. No girl could be married against her will, and I had never willed to be his wife.

I turned my restless head from side to side. My pillow had been so cold when I went to bed, and now it seemed to burn my face, Suddenly a new thought came. Why do I not get another opinion before my father's letter comes?—tell the story

as if it were not my own to some one who does not know Captain Brand? Madame La Peyre and Angélique are good, but they are not clever, and I want really clever advice. The sudden thought lulled me; I fell asleep at last, wishing I knew a lawyer.

I woke with a start; Angélique was at my bedside.

"What is it?"

I began to rub my eyes as if I wanted to rub them out—for the sunlight was shining in at my window, and I felt dazzled. Angélique's cheerful face quieted me.

"It is that Mademoiselle has slept so, so long, and Madame would not let me waken her till now."

"Dear me, how tiresome!"

I started up full of dismay—for I dislike late rising, the whole day is sure to go crooked afterwards. I found Madame La Peyre sweet and smiling and affectionate as ever. This is the charming part of her; she has no moods or caprices, one can always depend on her sweet, amiable temper. For a day or two after her lecture on my marriage I felt rather shy and stiff with her, but I am sure the stiffness was all on my side—and she is not only sweet, she is so bright and cheerful.

"Well, my sleeping princess," she says, when I come in, "so the hundred years are over already. I came and took a little peep at thee, and, my Gertrude, thy eyes looked sealed up for a long, long time, and thou hadst a so happy smile that I left thee to thy dreams. They were pleasant, were they not?"

"I hardly know; I was not very happy when I went to sleep." She looked inquisitive, and I went on fast to check a question. "I did not tell you that we met Mr. Donald yesterday, and he is coming to give me a reading lesson this afternoon."

Madame La Peyre looked a little troubled.

"I am very sorry, but thou canst receive him, my child; I have to go out. I have promised to teach the Miss Traceys how to do this fine embroidery."

I felt provoked.

"How industrious they are! I seem hardly able to find time for reading and practising, and they work and sketch, and do all sorts of things besides. I wonder why I do not learn to embroider?"

"Thou hast too little to do, my Gertrude, and so thy time slips away. When we return to Château Fontaine thou wilt find many employments which I cannot give thee here."

Here Angélique appeared.

"A letter for Mademoiselle."

I felt myself get red in an instant. I thought old Samuel had been treacherous, and had sent up Eugène's letter. I could feel that Madame La Peyre was watching me. But one look told me the letter was not from Eugène. There was a foreign

postage-stamp, but the handwriting was square and English-looking.

I tore it open. "My dear Gertrude." I looked on to the end, and there, in firm writing, that somehow made me feel afraid, was the signature "George Brand." I blushed still more, and then I felt vexed that Madame La Peyre should sit watching me, I crossed over to my favourite window-seat; I can kneel up there and read in comfortable solitude.

"—— Hotel,
"New York, December 4th, 18—.

"MY DEAR GERTRUDE,

"I have been wishing to write ever since I left Merdon, but I have been so constantly on the move that I have had little leisure for even necessary letters of business, so you must forgive me. I hope the songs came to hand and were what you liked." (I do not think I have said that, soon after he went away, a box of music and books and periodicals came down from London. It was very kind of Captain Brand, and we found them a great help while our friends were away.) "I think New York would amuse you very much. Life is very lively here, both as to business and amusement. The ladies dress much more gaily and fashionably than they do in London. They seem to give themselves up too much, I think, to the study of dress. New York is a handsome, well-built city, and, I should fancy, very pleasant to live in. I should like to show it to you.

"I have made a very interesting journey down the Mississippi, and went on from there to the far West, and got a week's hunting on the prairie—a country as wild, I fancy, as anything in Australia—a place where, if you want to stay any time, you must build your own hut and supply yourself with food and fuel. One of our companions set the prairie on fire, and the sight fully equalled any of the accounts I have read of such a scene. It was very grand; I should like

you to have seen it. You have such enthusiastic power of admiration that it would have given you double enjoyment.

"I hope you will be so very kind as to answer this letter. I shall spend Christmas in New York. When I return I shall possibly join my mother, in Scotland, but I hope to be with you again by the end of January, and to find you as blooming as when I left you. Take great care of yourself, especially among those rocks and stones. I hope you are able to amuse yourself, and that you do not suffer much from cold. I may stay with you longer next time, may I not? I hope so. Will you present my compliments to Madame La Peyre, and

"Believe me ever, your true friend,
"George Brand."

What a stiff, proper sort of letter! I need not have blushed when I came to the end; why, except that one little sentence about staying longer next time, the whole

letter might be put in a newspaper. Ah! how different from Eugène's letter! Well, I don't want Captain Brand to be in love with me, so why should I wish his letter to be different from what it is?

I came down from my perch and gave the letter to Madame La Peyre.

"From Captain Brand," I said carelessly. "I am not awake yet; I think I will go upstairs."

She is reading the letter, and does not hear me. But I do not care, I want to get out without Angélique's surveillance. I must see old Samuel. That dry, stiff letter has made me long more than ever for another from Eugène, and, if one comes, he will perhaps send it up to the house.

How can I answer Captain Brand? There is nothing to answer.

On the stairs I meet Angélique, who delays me with questions about a gown she is making for me; then, as I pass through the kitchen on my way out, the little blueeyed child holds up its mouth to be kissed, and I stop and play with it.

I felt very impatient by the time I reached Samuel's cottage. I went in at the door and walked straight into his office.

"It be you, be it, Missy?"

He scarcely turned his head.

"Good morning," I said, stiffly. "Why did you send my letter up to the house?"

He went on writing in an old brasscornered book; I spoke again, in a louder voice—

"Why did you send me a letter this morning? I told you I should call for my letters."

I grew very impatient. At last he stuck his pen behind his ear—

"So you did, that be true enough; so you did." Samuel turned slowly round on his stool, to look at me, with bland benevolence. I wish he did not remind me of the white-haired old gentleman who sold the spec-

tacles to Moses Primrose-" and I should ha' kept un for'ee; but this were a oversight; it were along of Madame Angelick a-comin' in as hur were passin' for thay letters, and hur gets argufyin' again about the rheumatics; hur never had thay, so I says hur can't know how to physic thay; my stomick is a English stomick, and Madam's physic be furrin; stands to reason them can't suit one another. Madame Angelick may be a good nuss; nussin' be mostly for women; but doctorin's for menlike most things as be sensible; so, as I was saying, I were worrited, and I ketches up thay letters—thay hadn't long been brought in, and there thay was "-he pointed to his desk-"and I gives thay as was for your place to Madam Angelick in a lump, and never give yourn a thought till hur were out of sight."

"Very well, it does not matter, but I hope you will be more careful," I said gravely; and then I added what I had been

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longing to ask before—"Did any other letter come to me before that one?"

Samuel grinned; then he got up stiffly, went to a cupboard just behind me, and came back with a letter in his hand.

"Be that un all right, Miss?"

I saw at once that this was from Eugène. I looked at Samuel; and my eyes fell, I felt red and ashamed at once: he looked so insufferably conscious that I had a secret. I hardly know what I said; but I got away as quickly as I could, went home and shut myself in my bedroom before I took the letter out of my pocket. Then I sat down to read it-it was even more loving, fuller of fond flattery than the last. I read it again and again, and then I thought over Captain Brand's, and put them, mentally, side by side. I might as well compare the graceful swallows that used to skim across the yard to the big Cochin-China fowls. Ah, if Madame La Peyre could only read Eugène's letter, she would no longer persist in her opinion of Captain Brand; for I suppose she considers a husband is bound to show some special friendship for a wife.

I clasped my hands over my eyes, and sat thinking. I am not as happy at getting this letter of Eugène's as I thought I should be—what is it? I used to detest mystery or anything like a secret; now I seem to be always planning; it is so humbling to feel that old Samuel suspects me; I must end it. I will not have any more secrets, I must try to carry out the purpose that came to me last night—find some one to consult. Yes, it is all very well to propose, but where am I to find this calm, collected friend who will get me out of my difficulty?

I may go on staying at Merdon for months, and I am even less isolated here than I should be at Château Fontaine; it will be more difficult there. Suddenly a sentence of my strong-minded governess came to me. She had lived with a family in the bush, before she lived with us, and she was quite a woman of resources— "When one can't get what one wants, one must do with what one has."

Whom have I at Merdon? Mr. Tracey? He ought to be the best person to askbut no, he takes no interest in anything but theological controversy and drainage. He would never give me his attention for long enough to understand my trouble. There are Mr. Newton and Mr. Donald. Certainly I could not tell the former, he talks so openly about everything, and I could not depend on his judgment. Donald is very clever, but I am afraid his is bookish cleverness—I fancy he knows the world through books much more than from personal experience of it. But still my case may not be beyond him; he is not the person I should choose, but he is the best here. I think I will ask Mr. Donald's opinion. And then I remember, with dismay, Madame La Peyre's prohibition for this afternoon. Some of these French rules of propriety seem very absurd.

I sit thinking over all my troubles, and how I am to get free of them, till our early dinner-time. After dinner Madame starts for the Rectory, with Angélique to carry her little work-bag; and then I rouse to a consciousness of dulness, and of a longing to escape from it. I would go to sit with Mrs. Dayrell, but that she has been ill all night, and extra quiet is needful for her. I am restlessly idle. I long to do something to get through the day, and yet I cannot bring myself to settle down to any employment; I cannot sing, for fear of disturbing Mrs. Dayrell.

My father's letter cannot be much longer in reaching me; it might have come before this, but the weather has been stormy, and old Samuel told me that this would delay the Australian mail. Now that the time draws so near I shrink from all there will be to do. I will not see Captain Brand

again; the very liking I felt for him last time would make it very painful to tell him face to face that I love Eugène. And yet, I am sure Captain Brand does not care to make me love him, or he would try to be less formal, and he would not write me a letter I could show to everyone. Whenever I think of that talk in the cabin of the Eclair, I feel puzzled; he was so different then, another man altogether; I certainly like him better now, he is calmer, and I do not feel so afraid of him; perhaps he was fonder of me at that time; it is possible that he too since then has met some one he loves. Oh! I hope so, and that he is as willing as I am to be released from this mock mar-This idea piques me; I like every-I do not want to be his one to care for me. wife, and yet I like to feel that Captain Brand will not be willing to give me up. I suppose this is only from contradiction. But how shall I get through this long afternoon?

CHAPTER IX.

UNEXPECTED.

HAVE been out, and I wish I had stayed at home; but I must go back to the beginning. I decided at last to go and walk up and down the kitchen-garden field. The walk from the house to the brook has become very unlike my first sight of it. The ever-moving ash-branches are bare in all their blackness; there are ferns still, but they peep out at rare intervals, and look brown and withered; the kitchen-garden is empty, except for some plots of cabbages and a border all down each side the path of pretty curled green stuff. But I found the change greatest when I reached the brook; in the land-

scape one misses the golden fields ready for harvest: there is still the brilliant green of the turnips, the dark earth of the ploughed land looks well against this, and richly suggestive of future crops, but the brook is utterly transformed, it has lost all its gay colouring; the willow herb has died down to the roots, I suppose, for there is no trace of its presence; the little blue flower has gone; the seed-pods are all empty and gaping; the water comes nearly to the top of the banks, and is not so clear as it was before the frost came; it is not frozen over to-day, but it seems still to be half congealed, the stream runs slowly and sullenly, wholly unlike the sparkling, swiftly-moving brook that babbled so brightly over its many-coloured bed.

I stood leaning on the gate in a weary, desponding mood; presently I heard footsteps; I turned round and saw Mr. Donald coming along the path from the village. Really I did not come here purposely to

meet him, though I must have known that he would keep his appointment; but I grew suddenly shy and nervous, and I would gladly have avoided him; the task I had set myself, now I was face to face with it, took a real and formidable shape—I felt it would be impossible to tell my story to Mr. Donald.

I opened the gate for him, but he did not smile; he seemed unusually cold and formal.

"I am afraid I cannot have the pleasure of reading with you, Miss Stewart, this afternoon, but I must go up to the Farm. I want to see Madame La Peyre—I have to give her a message from Mr. Newton."

I looked up puzzled, and his sad, perplexed face did not help my comprehension. "Mr. Newton!"—Mr. Donald generally calls him Newton, or Frank.

"Madame La Peyre is out—can I take the message? I will give it to her when she comes in." We are walking side by side along the walk bordered by those green curling plants. I do not intend Mr. Donald to go farther than the ash-trees, if I can prevent him. Perhaps Madame La Peyre is right—at any rate, I do not choose to disobey her.

"I hardly know whether that will do"
—a sudden look of anger comes into Mr.
Donald's blue eyes—"but the message is about you, Miss Stewart. Mr. Newton wished me to ask Madame La Peyre to permit him to have an interview with you to-morrow."

"An interview with me! Why, what for?" I felt the colour come rushing up to my temples.

Mr. Donald is looking at me, and I suppose he misunderstands my blush. He smiles.

"I beg your pardon, but a young lady generally understands the motive for a formal request of this kind." His voice is so bitter, so utterly unfriendly, that tears come to my eyes in an instant. I feel surprised and offended at Mr. Donald's words.

"You need not trouble to see Madame La Peyre; I"—I put a very haughty emphasis on the I—"can answer the message. I cannot see Mr. Newton as he wishes. I really do not know why he sends me such a message—will you tell him this, please?"

I looked up at Mr. Donald; his face cleared as if by magic, but still he seemed a little anxious.

"Is Frank to take this as a refusal to his hopes?" he said. "He will be greatly cast down; he thinks, pardon me for saying so,"—Mr. Donald hesitated and looked anxiously at me—"that—that you are favourably disposed towards him."

I had not felt quite sure of Mr. Donald's meaning before, but I felt very angry now. I understand that Mr. Newton wishes to "make an offer," and sends Mr. Donald to

prepare the way. If he had been brave enough to come and tell me this himself, I should have been obliged to pain him, but I should have pitied him so much. I should perhaps have felt grateful, but to hear that he had told another man that I had encouraged him was too much! I felt very angry.

"Mr. Newton makes a great mistake," I said abruptly; "I think he is very"—I hesitated for a word, and at last said, "presumptuous. I never thought of him in any way except as an acquaintance;" and then I was sorry for my harsh words—I, who so longed for affection, was angry with the poor fellow because he loved me.

"Ah!" Mr. Donald said, and we walked on in silence till we reached the ash-trees, and I stood still at the sharp turn leading to the Farm. I glanced up timidly at Mr. Donald—to my surprise, he did not look displeased with me for my unkindness about his pupil. There was, it seemed to me, a look of relief in his face, and a sweet, kind expression in his blue eyes, that gave me a foolish wish to cry. I felt that I must soften my words.

"I suppose I ought to say I am very grateful to Mr. Newton for his preference, and sorry besides, but you must excuse me. I am too troubled to think of what I am saying. I am,"—I choked down a sob, and tried to keep the words back, but they came—"I am so unhappy, so lonely—I have no real friend."

I turned my head away the instant I had spoken; I wished I had held my tongue; if I had not seen that kind look in his eyes, I should have kept quiet; now my heart throbbed, and I felt utterly uncomfortable.

Mr. Donald hesitated, then he said, slowly, "But you have Madame La Peyre and your guardian."

I turned round on him, full of scorn.

"And you consider they ought to satisfy me?—well, then, they cannot. Mr. Donald, I know I am not one of your proper, conventional young ladies; I don't do as I ought—I know that—I daresay I make great mistakes, but I have no one to advise me."—I forgot Mr. Donald in my misery, and I went on with a groan—"I am in great trouble, and I have no one to help me, no one to tell me what to do. Madame La Peyre could not understand, and my guardian is "—here I made a sudden effort at self-control—"he is very kind and good, but I could not consult him."

"Could I help you?"—so gently, so timidly spoken that I felt checked by surprise.

"I don't know," I answered; but as I spoke I felt sure he could not; he is too weak, or he would speak differently. It seemed as if he read my thoughts. He came nearer, and his voice was full of hope.

"Let me try to help you; a trouble

is always lighter when it is shared." Something in the tone made my cheeks glow; something, too, told me I had best be silent; and yet I would speak, and the words came out in a rush upon one another, in hurried agitation.

"No—oh no, I cannot share this trouble
—I cannot tell you or anyone—please go
away; no one, I know, can help me." Here
I looked up; Mr. Donald's eyes were fixed
on my face; he looked desperately earnest.
I felt that I had said something foolish,
and that I must dart down the steep lane;
but he did not give me time to think or
to act. He placed himself between me and
the lane.

"I cannot hide it any longer," he said abruptly—"I love you. Will you give me a right to advise you?—can you not give me hope?"

I stood like a stone; then I felt that he was close beside me, and my voice came back.

"No—no—oh no! What shall I do?" I could no longer keep from crying. "I asked you to be my friend—I can never care for you in any other manner."

I turned away impetuously, and then, while I stood there trembling in every limb, and feeling that all this was a dream, I heard quick steps going back along the road, and I knew before I looked round that Mr. Donald had gone away.

CHAPTER X.

MRS DAYRELL'S STORY.

"A ND I tell to Mademoiselle, she must pardon me for saying that I am not surprised; but I am very sorry—"

"Don't you talk of being sorry, Angélique—think how I feel. I considered Mr. Donald my friend, and now I can never speak to him again. I think men are horribly selfish and foolish; they presume upon nothing; I am sure it was not my fault. I have only been friendly in my manner."

I had felt very wretched all the morning, unhappy for Mr. Donald, and very discontented with myself, and yet I could not make up my mind to tell Madame La

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Peyre what had happened. She is very sweet and loving, but she is not a safe confidant; she told Angélique everything about the marriage, though Captain Brand had enjoined secresy. And yet I am preplexed, for how can I explain to her the estrangement which must henceforth exist between us and the Park? I once read in some book that it is a girl's own fault if she is offered love which she cannot accept, but then I never wanted these two tiresome men to love me; I only must make people like me; I never thought there was harm in this. What a difficult puzzle life is!

I took a diligent fit, and stayed indoors in the morning, trying to read; but about mid-day I went out into the yard, and found Angélique feeding her chickens; the pigeons flutter round and round her head, and at last one bolder than the rest settles on her shoulder. I seat myself on a huge block of stone beside the arched porch, and wonder how many girls have

sat there with heavier hearts than mine.

In former times this must have been a Manor-house. Good old families have lived here. The sculptured escutcheons over the porch, and over the chimney-piece in Madame's bed-room, tell that people of a different sort from farmers have occupied the house; and from this stone doubtless fair young brides have mounted to the pillion behind their bridegrooms, and have been carried away into the world. I sigh, really not so much for myself as in thinking that some of these lives must have been unhappy, my short experience of life tells me this; but Angélique comes up to me.

"Mademoiselle is sad; is it that Merdon is dull? Will Mademoiselle send word to the young ladies at the Rectory, to come and amuse her to-day?"

The idea of being amused by Georgiana Tracey is in itself amusing. I smile, and then I clasp Angélique's black sleeve between my hands and hide my eyes on it,

and bit by bit, I hardly know how, I tell her all that happened yesterday about Mr. Newton and Mr. Donald.

"Pardon me, Mademoiselle, I am not surprised," she says, "but I am very sorry;" and then she stands silently beside me when I have made the petulant answer I have written down.

"Why don't you speak?" her silence provokes me into fresh petulance; "why don't you say it is not my fault?"

As I look up in my impatience, I meet those wise, dark eyes of hers, so full of kind remonstrance that I feel checked.

"Mademoiselle knows that I cannot say so—it cannot be undone now, but it makes me sad for the future of Mademoiselle, and some day Mademoiselle will be willing to take the blame."

"If you are going to croak, you tiresome woman, I shall leave you here with the pigeons!" But though I announce this resolution with dignity, and turn away my head, I sit still on the mounting-block.

Angélique does not answer, and when I look round impatiently I am struck by her attitude; her hands, which usually fall straight on each side of her narrow black skirts, are clasped in front; her eyes are raised as if she is saying a prayer, but her lips do not move, they are pressed together in a straighter line than ever.

I feel my vexation slipping away; there is something wonderfully soothing about Angélique, something that always reminds me of shade in Summer heat, I love her even when she lectures.

I do not like to interrupt her, but presently she speaks of her own accord—

"Mademoiselle has asked about the poor Madame;" she glances up to the bedroom story; "and I have asked leave to tell her; it is strange how in many ways Mademoiselle resembles Mees Barbare before she married Monsieur Dayrell."

- "Did you know her so long ago?"
- "It is not so very long—about ten years,

perhaps; Mees Beaumont, that was her name, was to marry the young half brother of Monsieur La Peyre, and I was to go to England to fetch her to Château Fontaine, that she might be acquainted with our own Madame. Monsieur La Peyre had died long before. I shall not forget Mees Beaumont on the journey; she was as wild as a sauterelle; at the railway stations, and on landing from the steamer, I had trouble to keep her in sight; everything was to her new and amusing; and yet she had lived in London, but with some very quiet, dull ladies, who did not like gaiety, who were always finding fault with everything that was of the world, so I have heard."

"What disagreeable people!" I exclaimed.

"Well, Mademoiselle, I, too, think it is better to be gay than sad, above all for the young people; the butterflies are pleasanter to look at than the moths, who only come out to enjoy their life when all is dark and silent. It is impossible to be more charming, more gay, than is Mees Beaumont, when she is at Château Fontaine. When we return to Normandy I will conduct Mademoiselle to some cottages, and she will hear some old women speak in praise of Mees Barbare.

"Well, Mademoiselle, she staid for several weeks, and she seemed more and more happy, till Monsieur Dayrell arrive; then, perhaps it is in play, what do I know, but she begins to change; she and Monsieur seem always to quarrel; and one day I find her in the library—when he has gone away from her-crying and sobbing. I ask her what is it? is she ill? and she say, 'No, Angélique; only wicked, so wicked and self-willed, that I like to make Mr. Dayrell unhappy.' Mr. Dayrell went away, and Mees Beaumont grew more happy again, but she was never quite the same. I went back to England with her, when she was going to be married; and, Mademoiselle, when I

came to her to say good-bye, she has put her arms round me, and she has kissed me; she has said, 'Stay with me, to be my maid; I love you; never leave me;' but I was obliged to answer, 'No,' for I could not forsake my own Madame."

"How long was it before you saw Mrs. Dayrell again?" I had grown quite interested.

"I have never seen her again till we came here; often has Madame asked for Monsieur and Madame Dayrell to visit Château Fontaine, but they have always refuse, except once, and then Monsieur has come by himself. I was so surprise; he, who used to be so fine and handsome a gentleman, has grown thin and frowning; and when I ask him how is Madame, his wife, he frowns still more—'She is as well as usual,' he said, and then he turned away. They have never written Madame, till one day, there are some months, perhaps a year ago, a letter has come; it was Mr.

Dayrell who has written, and he asked Madame to go to his wife; he was going to travel. Our Madame was ill, and it was Winter, and she could not go for, perhaps a month after the letter has come. When we come to the house in London, Madame Dayrell was not there; our Madame waited on; and at last Madame has heard that Madame Dayrell is visiting some friends, and is very ill; then Madame went to her, and brought her here." Angélique stopped, and sighed.

"How unkind of her husband to leave her when she was ill!" I felt full of indignation.

"Madame was not ill when Mr. Dayrell went away; but, Mademoiselle, I can never, never forget the change in her face; it was not that she had grown so thin, and that her beauty had faded, but it was the change from sweet to bitter. Ah, but it is sad——"

Angélique stopped; she was not looking

at me, her eyes were on the far-off moorland hills; there was a look of question in them, as if she were trying to get an answer.

"Mr. Dayrell is unhappy, I suppose; perhaps she did not love her husband?"

I felt a sort of selfish relief. Surely, if Madame and Angélique have witnessed the effects of one ill-assorted marriage, they will be too just and kind to take part with Captain Brand.

"Yes, Mademoiselle, I think Madame has truly loved Monsieur Dayrell; but yet they are parted. I believe that Monsieur Dayrell has objected that Madame should take so much pleasure in admiration, should be so much what I think you call flirt; and Madame has considered that, if she was loving and faithful to him, it did not signify; she liked to be admired and followed, wherever she went. At last, when Mr. Dayrell found she would not change, he has said they would go abroad together, to some far-off place, so that his

wife might be separated from her admirers, and it is this which has caused the quarrel. Monsieur Dayrell has written several letters to his wife, but I do not think, Mademoiselle, that Madame has written once to him; and yet I am sure she wishes to see him, though she will never say so. It is her regret for what has happened that makes her suffer."

"But that is dreadful; cannot Madame La Peyre persuade her to write?"

Angélique shook her head.

"I do not think that our Madame would care to speak about Monsieur Dayrell to Madame, his wife. At first she has spoken, but it makes Madame Dayrell angry, and it is difficult to argue with a person who suffers; and now Mr. Dayrell has left off writing, and I do not think the poor Madame could know where to send a letter, even if she chose to write."

I felt awe-struck; I had lived among quiet calm people, and I had read few novels; this sad story seemed too terrible to be true. I could not realise that I knew a person who had wilfully destroyed and flung away love and happiness out of her life.

"Are you quite sure of all this?" I said, doubtfully—and then I glanced up. No, there was no doubt! It was impossible that that earnest, steadfast woman could exaggerate or falsify anything "Angélique," I went on eagerly, "don't you think, if we tried, we could find out—if you and I were to go and seek for Mr. Dayrell, I believe we should find him, and he will come back directly when he knows his wife is sorry."

Such a look of pity came into her dark eyes. I believe Angélique would make the fortune of any artist she sat to for a Madonna—although there is so little actual beauty in her face, in the way of form or colour.

"Mademoiselle," she said gently, "we have all our work marked out for us; I think if Mademoiselle and I were meant to

go and find this gentleman, our way would be shown us by le bon Dieu, and if I were to leave Madame Dayrell just now, I think she would suffer very much; she would not like a stranger who is not used to her to wait on her."

"Are you so very good a nurse, then?" I felt impatient that Angélique would not share my eagerness.

She shook her head.

"No, indeed, it is not that, but Madame Dayrell cannot bear a strange face; she will not tell how she suffers—it must be guessed. Well then, Mademoiselle, what will you? I am only the old bonne of her young days; I can watch her face, and it does not vex her. I may do anything for her, and when I am foolish, and do not please her, she can tell me so, she has the right. Allons, but it is something when one is suffering to have some one to share the burden."

"You mean" (I smiled at Angélique's ingenuity) "that she can be cross to you

whenever she chooses. Well, I dare say you are right, and I do not think you could be spared; but it is terrible that nothing can be done to bring this husband back."

"We cannot know that," she said softly.

"His absence may be for good, all this was ordered long ago. Mademoiselle, all will come right, as it is willed."

This sounded so fatalistic and coldblooded, that I jumped off the mountingblock and went down to the gate. Two or three black-faced pigs—I had incautiously befriended them lately by giving them some of the chickens' food—came trotting across the straw, squeaking and grunting with their noses in the air and their tails in a coil.

"Oh, Angélique, come, please come and drive the pigs away!" I could not open the gate without letting some of my grunting friends out in my company.

Angélique smiled as she came to my help; she has a way of smiling at me, when I believe she is laughing in her heart, but I love her too much to be cross. I hurried on to the village, glad to be free of the pigs. I love other animals, but I cannot return the liking these pigs have for me; the little ones amuse me certainly, but the big ones are so greedy; besides their greediness, they are so dirty and so insufferably inquisitive, always peering and prying about everything, whether it concerns them or not. They put me in mind of Rosalie. I have not thought of her for a long time, and I shiver at the remembrance.

This set me thinking about Eugène. "How much has Eugène told his mother about me, I wonder? I must ask him." I had just reached the pump in the middle of the village.

"Miss, Miss," Samuel was calling to me.

I turned quickly; Samuel and two other old men were leaning against the low wall that surrounds the church-yard. Samuel came forward from the others, and half shut one eye, in the way I dislike so much.

"What do you want?"

I spoke haughtily; it is too much that this old man should assume a right of being in my confidence.

He looked very significant. "If you'll come back to the office, Miss, you shall see. I du be thinkin' you be in luck's way this week."

Spite of my trying hard to prevent it, I felt my face burn. "What do you mean?" but I did not look at him.

"Well, Miss, there du be but one sort o' goods as goes out from my place, and that be letters, and one have come for Miss Gertrude Stewart this morning, and the post-mark on it be from some far-off, out-of-the-way place or another; and I were a-thinkin' three letters in one week would please 'ee, may be."

"I am in no hurry for it, thank you," I

said, indifferently, for I guessed that it was another letter from Captain Brand, "it can wait till I come back from the Rectory; you can send it down to the house for me."

I walked as fast as I could. The clumps of Scotch firs on each side of the Rectory gates gave a cheerful look now that the other trees were leafless. The house itself was not interesting; low and white, with a slated roof; its best feature was that bowwindows came out at odd places, where you did not expect them, and suggested quaint, comfortable rooms inside.

I was shown into one of these bowwindowed rooms. It was not pretty so far as regarded arrangements and furnishing, but it had an amount of pleasant litter in it that made it very enjoyable: tables strown with books, a high chimney-piece in dark oak reaching to the ceiling, and on the mantel-shelf a gathering of odds and ends in blue china; there were blue tiles, too, in

the fire-place, and while I waited for Mrs. Tracey I amused myself watching the light flicker over the grotesque faces and figures on the tiles. There were landscapes on some of them, and one of the subjects reminded me strangely of Mount Wellington, the stiffness too in the foliage took me back to Tasmania. I sighed and looked more closely at the little picture, and yet since I saw Eugène I have not wished to be at home again. I should like to see my father, often a keen longing to be with him comes to me: but then I cannot remember that he ever seemed fond of me, and home without my mother, now that I have learned something of what my mother really was, seems dreary enough.

I moved closer to the fire, to see if there were any more subjects or landscapes, and a sudden thought came: Was the far-away place Samuel spoke of Tasmania, and was the letter from my father? Why did I not think of this? I felt that I must go

back instantly, and make old Samuel give me the letter. I rose up from my chair and stood thinking. The fire-place was not in the middle of the room, but on one side of the door, and a huge Indian screen came circling round the cosy sofa in front of it, shutting in a book-table at one end, and a little work-table in front of an easychair at the other.

While I stood before the fire wrapped in this intense thought, I did not hear the door open behind the screen. All at once I heard,

"I tell you she is a thorough flirt; I know she does not really care for either Frank Newton or the tutor, only she tries to get the admiration of every man she meets with."

It was my friend Lina's voice, and she came out from behind the screen, followed by her sister. I did not look at Lina; I felt sorry for her, and I was too confused to speak.

"Oh! how do you do? Does Mamma

know you are here?" Lina did not seem disconcerted—she spoke as easily and pleasantly as usual; "she will be delighted to see you."

Georgiana Tracey shook hands in silence; she is not polite, but she is more honest than her sister is, and I believe she felt ashamed. Mrs. Tracey came in before I could answer. I saw how much younger I was than Lina. I feel still conscious and constrained—for I know she was talking about me—and Lina was quite collected. Mrs. Tracey always kisses me, and I do not care to kiss people unless I love them. A kiss is such a sacred thing that I seem to be telling a silent falsehood when I receive Mrs Tracey's succession of kisslets, which are so like the chirrup of a bird.

"So glad to see you, dear;" another chirrup kiss; "so kind of you to come; what shall we do when you leave Merdon?"

The words came to me as words come when one awakens from sleep—my mind

was completely absorbed. I only realised dimly what Lina had said. If that letter was from my father, then my doom, the fate of my whole life, was lying in Samuel's little room, and in my foolish impatience I had actually passed it by. I had sense enough left to know that I must not betray my agitation to Mrs. Tracey.

I had sat down mechanically by her on the sofa. I made some vague answer, and I saw her look at her daughter. I suppose she found my manner strange.

"How is dear Madame La Peyre? So very good and kind of her to give us that embroidery lesson yesterday. Georgiana and Lina mean to do the work for sale among our friends; isn't it clever of them?"

"For church purposes only," said Georgiana, loftily.

I smiled; with all my pre-occupation I wondered what difference it could make what they did with the money; it seemed to me like any other amateur production for

sale, an attempt to save at the expense of those to whom needlework or any other gift was a means of living.

"Mrs. Dayrell is very ill." I spoke abruptly, I so longed for an excuse to get away that I hardly knew what I said.

"Ah, poor thing! I should have been so glad," said Mrs. Tracey in her most sugared tone, "to have seen something of Mrs. Dayrell, I am sure she is so nice; I know some of her people; Lord Beaumont's family, they are all charming."

Mrs. Tracey said things of this kind in a way which I thought insufferable.

"I am afraid I cannot agree with you that poor Mrs. Dayrell is charming." Mrs. Tracey's foolishness made me more and more contradictory.

Mrs. Tracey patted my hand, and laughed.

"She says those downright things in such a bright, saucy, original way that they are irresistible." Then she turned quickly to her daughters—"I forget if you have seen Mrs. Dayrell, girls?"

"I saw her once being drawn in her chair," said Georgiana, "and I thought she looked like a lady."

"My dear! what else could she look like; she comes of a very old family indeed. She is connected with the Howards, and one of her uncles married the great-niece of a duke."

I knew while Mrs. Tracey spoke that this was actually the creed in which I had been reared in my home; but then with us it had been felt, more than asserted. Besides, my mother would not have said such a one was a lady because she happened to be well descended; the inference she would have drawn was that a well-born woman ought to justify the circumstance of her birth by good behaviour, and I knew that she disliked people to talk about family connections; she said it was quite as of-

fensive as pride of money, or any other kind of personal obtrusiveness.

I believe I say all this now to salve my conscience, for it was simple contradiction that made me differ from Mrs. Tracey.

"I don't see that belonging to an old family can make people refined and gentle, unless they are so naturally."

Mrs. Tracey smiled at her daughters.

"Ah, it is very well for you to talk in that way, but, my dear, it is in the blood a born gentleman or a born lady cannot be ill-bred or ill-behaved."

"I am not sure of that," I said gravely. I had no reason for contradicting Mrs. Tracey, but I felt inclined to show her that I could be rude if she teased me much longer.

"Have you heard from home lately, dear?"

The question set my impatience ablaze. I rose. "No, I have not; I hope to hear soon. I must go home now, I think."

"Oh! pray don't hurry. Girls, I hope you have planned a walk with Miss Stewart, you will so like it. You can't think"—this was said low, with her farewell kissing—"how much my girls enjoy being with you!"

I did not answer; it seemed to me that everything was hollow, and false, and unreal. I had distrusted Mrs. Tracey's sweetness from instinct, because she gave it so spontaneously; but I had believed in Lina, she had seemed very fond of me, and now by chance I had learned her real opinion of me—how false she was! I could scarcely shake hands with her; actually Georgiana, the stiff, formal member of the family, was the only one of the Traceys, to-day, to whom I said a cordial good-bye.

When I remember the pace at which I came down the break-neck lane that leads from the high-road to the Rectory, I wonder I reached the bottom in safety. A strange, unreasoning terror had seized me,

that I should never see this coveted letter; and also, now that it had arrived, the reliance I had felt in its authority crumbled, and I was beset with doubts and misgivings. Suppose my father thought the marriage a real one? Was I wrong, after all? Angélique's words came back pertinaciously. Was a husband's authority more real than a father's, and could Captain Brand set aside all opposition?

I reached the post-office at last.

"Samuel," I called from the window. There was no answer. "Samuel!"

I had not patience to wait. I went to the door, which, instead of standing open as usual, was close shut, but it opened when I turned the handle. Samuel was not in, and when I stood at the foot of the little staircase and called, no answer came. My calling had attracted attention, and a little group of school-children had clustered round the door, and greeted me when

I appeared, with widely-opened blue eyes.

"Where is Samuel?" I said, sharply, to a red-cheeked boy, who stood eyeing me, with one fat finger in his mouth.

For answer he turned to a girl just behind, but she tried to hide her face in her sun-bonnet when she found herself drawn into notice.

"Where be grandfeather, Elsie? her" the wet finger was pointed stolidly towards me—"be a-callin' for he."

The girl looked at me, and then hid her face on the boy's shoulder. I had begun to smile at her, but at this I frowned with impatience. The boy shook Elsie off, and then he saw my frown, and paused, with his mouth open.

"Ask her where your grandfather is."

The boy looked away, stuffed both hands in his pockets, and fell back among the little group. Feeling himself in safety at that distance, he yelled out"Him be gone to Charlford; him 'll stay till noight."

And then he set the example to the rest, and they darted off helter-skelter till they were safely hidden among the elm-trees. I stood still, a sudden dull stupor had taken the place of my impatience. I went slowly home across the brook. There was no one in the yard when I reached it; I passed through the kitchen, and the old man called to me from the fireside.

"Miss, ye be not to go upstairs above a bit, our poor lady be took wuss, and Madam herself have gone for the doctor, so that he may make more speed."

A pang of reproach went through me. How selfish I had been! so utterly wrapped in my own feelings about this letter that I had quite forgotten Angélique's sad story, even when Mrs. Tracey spoke of Mrs. Dayrell I had not remembered it, and had talked unkindly of her. It all came back

now, and my letter faded for the time into insignificance.

I listened at the stair-foot, but I could not hear anything; even Mrs. Dayrell's cough was still. An awe crept over me; I went as softly as I could into the parlour. There was a letter lying on the table, but I did not look at it. Presently, as I crossed the room, and put down my hat and cloak in the window-seat, I saw the address. I did not take it up as eagerly as I expected, the glow and life had been taken out of everything this morning.

Yes, it was my father's handwriting. My senses wakened at this sight, and my heart beat so thick and fast that it seemed to fill my throat. I opened it, and read; but I will give the letter itself:—

"MY DEAR CHILD,"—(The tender word brought tears so quickly and passionately that I could not go on reading, and when I did, I had blistered the paper with the

scalding drops.)—"Your letter troubled me very much; we had heard of the loss of the Adelaide, so that I was in a measure prepared for your sad news. We had feared you were both lost; therefore, in the midst of our sorrow, it was a comfort to find that you, my dear Gertrude, had been spared.

"I cannot bring myself to write of your dear mother's loss. I shall never get over it. I consider that she acted with her usual wisdom in accepting Captain Brand as your husband, and thus obtaining for you in your desolate position a legal protector; you are too young to appreciate this wisdom, and it is this part of your letter which troubles me. I cannot bear to think of your position if she had not given you this protector, for you would have reached England in an utterly friendless and deserted state. I could not have provided for the expense of your return journey here, nor could your dear mother have burdened Madame La Peyre with you, but for the liberality of Captain Brand towards you. He writes me a manly, generous letter; the provision he makes for you now, and also in the event of his death, entirely satisfies me, and ought to satisfy any girl. Acting on the references which he furnishes, and which your dear mother's letter also contains, I have made inquiries about him, and I hear him most highly spoken of by everyone.

"It is true—and I am glad that you, Gertrude, as my daughter, should feel this somewhat—that under more genial circumstances the captain of a merchant ship is not exactly the husband I should have found for you; but your dear mother was an excellent judge of human nature, and she must have had much opportunity for judging Captain Brand: you may be sure he will make you a good husband, a husband whose affection you may be proud of. Therefore now, my dear child, may God bless you! I repeat that your first feeling

is natural, because it is merely a carrying into action the principles in which you have been reared. But now that you have my full permission to love your husband as a wife ought to do, and to make him happy, I hope you will see him with different eyes, if you have not done so already. By this time, no doubt, you have grown more reconciled to your new state of life.

"I will not again allude to expressions in your letter, evidently the result of your sad position at the time of your dear mother's death—a position I greatly deplore, and yet which might have been so much worse if you had been left without a legal protector—still it is best to say decidedly that, even if I had the will to set aside this marriage, I have not the power; also I have not the means to provide for you, either in England, or to enable you to return here, unless I commit an act of injustice to your sisters, who, remember, are both unmarried, and wholly unprovided for.

You are now entirely dependent on your husband, and I rejoice that he is so generously disposed towards you. He tells me that after his next voyage he intends to give up his profession, for a time, at least, and settle down into domestic life in England. In all ways you are a happy girl, my dear Gertrude, and I have written by this mail to tell your husband that I am completely satisfied with your mother's choice. Your sisters are from home, and are still ignorant of the news in your letter; it will be a great surprise for them, and I have no doubt you will soon receive their congratulations."

Then came a courtly message to Madame La Peyre, the wording of which brought my father more visibly before me than any part of the letter had done, and then the signature—

"Your affectionate father,

"ALGERNON REGINALD H. STEWART."

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CHAPTER XI.

AN ALARM.

T CAN never know how long I had sat in my room, bowed down with shame and sorrow. I had never once dreamed that my father would so readily agree with all that had happened, and that he would take this cheerful view of my position—that he would give me up gladly to dependence on Captain Brand. I was roused at last by the sound of my name.

"Gertrude, Gertrude, my child!"

It was Madame La Peyre's voice. I got up and opened the door, but I first crumpled my open letter into my pocket.

"Barbara wants to see thee, my dear. I do not think she will be long with us, Gertrude. I fear she is much worse."
I could not speak. I bent my head
mechanically and followed her.

The wind rustled plaintively through the long uneven passage; and now and then it made some of the old timber strain and creak with a sudden sound like the sharpness of a hard woman's voice. Madame La Peyre stopped at the door, and knocked gently; I shrank from going in. father's letter had brought that awful death-scene in the boat so vividly before me that I dreaded the sight of Mrs. Dayrell's face. Angélique opened the door, and she looked earnestly at me. She must have seen my agitation, for she whispered to me, while Madame La Peyre passed on to the bedside. "Mademoiselle need not be afraid, since an hour Madame suffers less."

Mrs. Dayrell was lying, propped up by pillows, over which her long fair hair streamed in profusion. Her mouth was wide open, the lips drawn away from the teeth, as if to give the labouring breath freer passage; she panted, and her distended eyes showed me, spite of Angélique's assurance, that she was still suffering. I had thought the day chilly out of doors, but I saw that the window was partly open. Mrs. Dayrell smiled, and moved her thin hand towards me.

"Ah! you have come at last, Gertrude; in your place I would have come oftener." She paused for breath, and I felt it had been unkind of Madame La Peyre to bring this reproach on me. "Youth is as refreshing to a sick woman as sunshine is. There, child," she went on after a little, "you need not take my blame to heart; you have your excuse; I know how dull I am, and how vexatious."

At this the tears began to run down my face, and I pulled out my handkerchief to stop them. Mrs. Dayrell looked away from me; then she turned her wild blue eyes upon Madame La Peyre.

"It surprises you, Eugénie, to hear me call myself names; but it is Angélique who has taught me. I sometimes quite hate her for the way in which she makes me see I am wicked and disagreeable."

Madame La Peyre looked at the bonne in sudden wonder at the charge, and a flush of shame mounted to Angélique's forehead.

"I beg Madame's pardon," she said, humbly, "if I have forgotten myself; Madame will, I hope, believe that I could not have intended to teach her."

"Thou art an old goose, ma mère, to take all I say literally." Here she gasps painfully. I followed her eyes as they rested on Angélique, and I was surprised; all the fierce hard light had fled from them. I almost fancied I could see tears. "Allons, dost thou never guess how thy patience and sweetness teach, then, old woman? Why, sometimes, Eugénie, I go on from bad to worse to see how much

she will bear, and the only rebuke she ever makes is silence. Ah, she bears much!"

She leaned back exhausted, and no one spoke. Presently she said, faintly,

"You may all go—all. I want to be alone."

Madame La Peyre kissed one of the wasted hands that lay stretched out on the bed, and I was going to follow her example, but, as I stooped, Mrs. Dayrell lifted up her hand and laid it on my head.

"Child," she whispered, "do you know I wish I could change places with that poor old nurse. Go now—I am faint." And then she motioned with her hand towards the door.

I followed Madame La Peyre downstairs. "Madame, will she die?" I said.

Madame La Peyre had flung herself into an armchair in the parlour, and was giving way to an agony of grief which terrified me. I had never seen a grown-up person give way to violent sorrow. She bowed her head in answer, but she went on crying.

I confess I was surprised I did not think Madame was so fond of her sisterin-law. She sat up presently, and dried her eyes.

"My poor Barbara," she said, "and we cannot make her happy among us; it is sad to think how little happiness she has had in her life."

This set me off thinking. Is it because Madame La Peyre and Angélique have known so much happiness in their lives that their faces have that look of serene peace? Peace is hardly the word for it, there is no monotony in the look. I mean it is so full of brightness. Is it because she has known so much sorrow that Mrs. Dayrell's face is so wild and stormy?

At this my father's letter comes back, and I feel mad with shame and anger. It is bad enough that my own father should cast me off, should hand me over to a man he has never seen—but till now I have never realised my dependence. I am then a beggar. It is Captain Brand, and not Madame La Peyre, who has paid all my expenses since I left the Adelaide. I spoke once to her about it, and she told me she was keeping account of what was spent, and it should be all settled some day, and I had hoped to find a draft in my father's letter which would have enabled me to free myself.

In my selfishness I forgot Mrs. Dayrell and Madame La Peyre's grief. I turned suddenly to her.

"Madame, does Captain Brand give you money to spend for me?"

There was quite a shocked look on her gentle face, but she spoke courteously.

"I wish thou wouldst not ask me, dear child."

"Pardon me, I must ask," I said, stubbornly; "it is necessary I should know."

"But the Captain wished to keep this from thy knowledge. I cannot tell why

this is, Gertrude; but as I have said so much, in justice to him I tell thee that I would not accept all he wished to give, and that I am sure thou wilt not find it easy to expend even that which he has arranged to pay."

I trembled with vexation.

"I will not spend any, Madame; do not give me any more clothes or books. I would rather wear rags than spend his money."

She looked frightened now, as well as shocked; at last she pointed to the room above.

"Ah! my child, take warning—do not rebel," she said, solemnly; "I believe thou knowest Barbara's sad story, and how my poor sister, who drove her husband from her, repents bitterly, and wearies to see him once before she dies."

I shuddered—something in the sickroom upstairs had made death real, and the thought of death was terrible. "But he is her husband, and she loves him, and I do not, cannot love Captain Brand."

"My child, it is useless to discuss the question; it is always useless to discuss that which is irrevocable." Madame reminded me of the Abbé, as she said this with calm dignity. "When thou and Captain Brand are always together, my dear Gertrude, thou wilt love him as husbands and wives should love one another; thou hast some ideas which do not exist in real life, they are only to be found in romances; it is, I think, the fault of thy education; it was the same, alas! with my poor Barbara."

Madame again put her handkerchief to her eyes, but I do not think there were any tears; she only wanted to quiet me.

For the time I was doubtless mad under the bitter humiliation and disappointment that had come upon me. I went out and stood beneath the stone porch. The bitter wind had fulfilled its mission, and thick flakes of snow were falling so fast that the pig-yard was already whitened. I stood bareheaded, and let the snow fall wet and heavy on my hair and dress. I did not shrink from the cold; my head was burning, and my blood seemed to be rushing like fire through my veins. I should have stood there much longer but for Angélique. She came out from the porch, took my arm, and led me in before I could decide on resistance.

"I want to tell Mademoiselle about our poor Madame," the sly old woman said.

She moved into the kitchen, and I followed her. No one was there, except the old man in the ingle-nook. Angélique shut the door, caught up a towel, and began to dry my hair and shoulders.

"Mademoiselle Gertrude,"—there was a grave, sad smile on her lips—"it is true our Madame is better again—better than I could have hoped; but I will ask Mademoiselle to wait yet a little before she gives me another patient upstairs."

I felt how childish I had been; in contact with Angélique, somehow my anger shrank into pettiness. I was not afraid of her, but I could not bear to lose her esteem.

"I am very unhappy, Angélique—and not by my own fault this time."

"Then I must take the better care of Mademoiselle," she said, affectionately, and began to rub me dry with a fresh towel.

CHAPTER XII.

A FELLOW-PASSENGER.

NEXT morning the snow lay thick on the thatch, and on the trees, and on the hills, though some of these sent their brown shoulders through the dazzling whiteness, as if, in shivering, they had pushed them bare.

While Angélique was so much engaged with Mrs. Dayrell, Mrs. Cornish, the farmer's wife, helped the girl who waited on us. She was laying the breakfast-table when I came in, and she pointed to the windows. They were really beautiful. I could make out landscapes and trees and flowers in the silver tracery of hoar-frost.

I had never seen anything so beautiful, and I longed to go out among the snow-laden trees. I heard that Mrs. Dayrell was still sleeping; she had had a very restless night, and I was to breakfast alone, without Madame La Peyre.

I was glad to be alone; my mind was full of my trouble, full of sorrow and perplexity. Selfish as I was, my sorrow was not all caused by my father's letter. I began to see there was even greater trouble than mine at hand. I thought much of Mrs. Dayrell and her husband. Angélique's manner, when she told this sad story, implied that I was chiefly told it as a lesson for myself. As yet I could not see the application. Τt would certainly be sinful and wrong in every way for a married woman to flirt; but then that is a thing that everybody knows. I cannot see that I am in this position. Does Angélique mean that it is wrong to flirt at all?

Mrs. Cornish came in. She made an excuse about the coffee, but she stood chattering, and I was not in a mood to enjoy her broad Devonshire talk, as I have done till now. I felt chilled and silent, and I wanted to get away from everyone.

"If Madame La Peyre asks for me, you can say I am walking up and down the kitchen-garden." And I went out.

I dared not go into the high-road. I felt that I was so changed from my ordinary self that if I met the Traceys they must notice something unusual; and I actually shrank from meeting Mr. Donald. I looked at the snow, lying in white unbroken masses far as my eyes could reach, dazzling in its whiteness beneath the lowering leaden sky; but the trouble that lay at my heart, the unsifted thoughts, and the inward misgiving that would keep them ever rising, soon drew my attention to my own affairs again. Does Angélique mean that it is wrong to flirt at all? My natural resource

and refuge was to try to recall home teaching on this subject. I am not sure that I have heard it much discussed: but I think my mother has spoken of a flirt as an unladylike, undignified girl, certainly not as a wicked person. After all, what is flirting? It is possible I may have flirted without knowing I did it. I never saw anyone flirt, but I fancy it means liking to amuse oneself with the admiration, or perhaps the love, of others. I stop, blushing -that would certainly be wrong and selfish; but, after all, everyone must like to be loved, and I cannot help Mr. Newton and Mr. Donald liking me more than I thought they did. I only wanted them to be my friends. Ah, I know now it was not all for Mrs. Dayrell and her husband that I was so heavyhearted this morning. I am standing near the ash-trees, and I see again Mr. Donald's bent head and crouching figure, just as I saw them then. Poor fellow, he was so timid, so shy even; he would never have

said that he loved me if he had not thought I-well, that I should like to hear it. Oh, I am very sorry if I encouraged him to think so! I cover up my face with my hands—I feel as if I must shut out daylight -there seems to be a struggle in my mind which I cannot conquer. I am either going mad, and so fancying foolish thoughts, or it is true that I am not what I think I am -the Gertrude I have seen in myself was a frank, truthful, generous girl, who certainly could not do a meanness—and it is hard to write down what I see instead. Now I understand what Angélique meant when she said I should not try to make everyone love me. Thoughts rise like waves, rolling one over another. I have got so confused and unhappy that I wander on, not caring where I go, and pass through the little gate beyond the ashtrees; suddenly I rouse some distance along the high road.

I look round me scared. I have been vol. II.

walking a long while. I am tired, and my boots are covered with crusted snow.

"Well," I say, and I push my hat back from my hot forehead, and let the keen, chill air blow upon it, "I am cured for the present; I will not try to make anyone care for me again in a hurry. I will be as cold, and formal, and disagreeable as Georgiana Tracey is."

I turned towards home, and began to walk as fast as I could. When I reached the ash-trees, I saw Madame La Peyre standing near the gate of the cabbage-garden, looking round her with an anxious, troubled face. I ran forward and kissed her on both cheeks, almost before she saw me coming.

"Did you think I was lost?"

"Ah, my child, thou art here." She kissed me so tenderly that I felt ashamed of my heedlessness. "But I was puzzled where thou hadst gone, because Mrs. Cornish has said thou art in this garden. But come



into the house with me, Gertrude, I have so much to tell. So much has happened this morning."

"Is Mrs. Dayrell better?" I felt sure she was, Madame La Peyre looked so much brighter.

"Yes, yes, Dieu merci, she is better. But, Gertrude, a visitor has come—a Mr. Howard—to see thee. He is a clergyman—why, my child, art thou ill? What is it, then?"

I leaned against the stone wall beside the road leading down to the farm-yard. I felt sick and faint. Could it be Mr. Howard of the Adelaide? When I parted from him on board the Eclair, he was very ill, and I had no prospect of coming to England. I had rejoiced in the thought that I should never see again this only witness of my marriage, and of all that sad, dreadful time.

"It is nothing—I have been walking

very fast," I said. "I shall be better soon."

But I had frightened her, she made me lean on her arm, and she did not speak again, except to ask me how I felt, till she had arranged me comfortably on her own sofa. I had also to drink a tumbler of eau sucrée before she would finish her story.

"Well, my child, it is strange how things happen. Mr. Howard is an old friend of Mr. Tracey, and he comes to stay with him yesterday, and they speak of thee, and he says he knows thee; and so as early as possible he comes to see thee—he is so sorry to have missed thee."

"Yes," I said indifferently. I saw that Madame La Peyre had not finished, and I shrank from hearing that Mr. Howard had told my story at the Rectory—the very thought made me giddy again.

"It is strange how events are ordered. In conversation, Mr. Howard says, too, that he has met, some months ago, at Sydney, before his voyage, a Mr. Dayrell,"—I began to listen eagerly:—"this gentleman has been thrown from his horse, and Mr. Howard has visited him, as they were in the same hotel; and I think Mr. Howard has been very kind——"

This fresh news was a relief; I interrupt her. "But does he know where Mr. Dayrell is now?"

"He says that this gentleman—it is possible, Gertrude, that it is not my brother Henri, though the description is like him—was to leave Sydney when he was strong enough, and to go direct to France to see his relations."

I started up on the sofa. "Madame, it is he, and he may be now at Château Fontaine. You will tell Mrs. Dayrell this news, and it will cure her; and we will all go as soon as possible to Normandy."

Madame La Peyre shook her head.

"Be reasonable, my child; France is a large country, and there may be other

persons named Dayrell. I could not tell my poor Barbara anything unless I was sure that Mr. Howard has seen her husband."

I was walking about the room in my excitement.

"Oh, yes, yes, it is our Mr. Dayrell, and if he came back in time, she would recover, Madame. The news that he has been heard of will bring her back to life. I have heard of such things. Oh! do let us tell her there is hope—please do!"

I hugged Madame while I spoke, and kissed both her cheeks.

"Was there ever so enthusiastic a child?" Madame smoothed her ruffled hair with her handkerchief—she was too dainty to do this with her little white fingers. "When shall we make a reasonable woman of thee, my Gertrude? Perhaps never. There are natures very like grass, my child; tread them down, freeze them, or scorch them, they suffer for the time,

for they are never insensible, these fresh natures, only they always spring up green, and bright, and ever young, as soon as they get the dew or the sunshine they require."

I got impatient with this sentiment, when I was so excited.

"But you will tell her-"

"I will consult Angélique; she watches Barbara so constantly that she will know best; and besides, Angélique has much wisdom. She will say whether such news will do good or harm. And I must again see Mr. Howard and ask questions."

When Madame La Peyre speaks in that sweet, grave manner, I find it hard to go against her; there is something very powerful in inert softness. I remember once trying to lift a feather-bed, and I was surprised at the resistance it made.

"There are many doubts to be weighed," she went on; "it may not be Henri, or he may be still in Australia; or it is possible," Madame said, in a pretty little precise way which put me out of patience, "that this good Mr. Howard has deceived himself about the name."

I believe I should have made a very intolerant answer, but Madame spoke before I could get out the words.

"But here comes Angélique—I will tell her. Now run away, Gertrude, while I consult her."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE POWER OF HOPE.

I SOON went back to Madame La Peyre.
Angélique was coming out of the room; there were tears in her eyes, but she looked very happy.

"Well," I said, "she is to be told; you are not going to keep it from her?"

"Madame will tell Mademoiselle;" and Angélique stood aside to let me pass, as if she had no voice in the matter, although I knew perfectly well that Madame La Peyre had been guided by her judgment.

"Thou must be patient, Gertrude," Madame said, looking up from her embroidery, "and thou must not be romantic.

Angélique thinks that we may tell the news gently, but not till to-morrow morning."

"And suppose she is worse this afternoon, and dies?" How can these two old women delay? They forget how young people live on hope.

Madame shook her head.

"The doctor said this morning that we must be very careful. It seems that the sleep she has now fallen into is a sort of crisis; therefore we must be patient till to-morrow."

Again I felt suppressed by Madame's calm wisdom—so much deeper than I had expected from her; and yet what a thing is lip-wisdom!

About nine o'clock in the evening Mrs. Dayrell roused. Madame La Peyre was sitting by her, for Angélique had lain down to get a little rest after her long, anxious watching. I was near Madame, but she signed to me to go away as soon as the

sick woman moved. I had not been downstairs half-an-hour, when Madame came hurrying into the parlour. She seated herself in perfect silence, but when I looked, I saw that she was disturbed—frightened, I fancied.

"What has happened?—is she worse?" "No, Dieu merci." Then Madame's penitence overcame her, and she wiped her eyes. "Ah, ma petite! it is very easy to preach about imprudence, but it is difficult to act out one's own teaching. I do not know how—I fancy our poor Barbara is too clever for me—but, in some way, she has divined from my face that I have a secret which I am keeping from her. Then she raises herself, and cries out, 'You have news of Henri; tell me, tell me quick!' What wilt thou, Gertrude? I was alone, and I cannot be hard, and take away from my poor Barbara this crumb of hope of which she seems to make so much. So I say to her all which Mr. Howard has said. 'I will see Mr. Howard—now, this minute; she cries out, and my poor Barbara sits upright in bed, with a large red spot on each cheek, and her eyes so bright that I am in terror. 'Do you hear me?' she says, angrily—'go and send for this person.' I got up and went and told Angélique, and Angélique says I must now send for Mr. Howard, and that she is anxious for Barbara. It is possible, my child, that there may be a relapse;" and Madame La Peyre began to cry very pitifully.

She had sent a messenger to the Rectory before she came to me, and while I was still trying to comfort her the boy came back with a little pencilled note. It was from Mrs. Tracey. The Rector and his visitor had gone to Charlford, and were not expected back till next morning.

I hear this morning that Mrs. Dayrell has been awake all night. I do not think Madame La Peyre has slept either; her

eyelids look so red and swollen as she sits opposite me at breakfast. We have just finished breakfast, and Mrs. Cornish comes in:—

"The gentleman that came yesterday be in the lane," she said; "him'll be comin' this way. Shall I show he in?"

Madame La Peyre started up. She had to make such an effort at composure that I think she will not be able to lecture me on my enthusiasm, as she calls it, for some time to come.

"The dear, good man," she said. "Yes, yes, Mrs. Cornish, I will go and meet him."

I shrink from Mr. Howard, or I too would go and meet him. I dread to see him, and yet I long to tell him that Mr. Dayrell must be brought back to his wife. Now that they know how they love one another, they cannot surely quarrel again. It seems to me that love blots out all faults. I am sure, whatever Eugène may do, I shall always think him right.

The snow has melted near the house, and I stand looking at the dear little flowers just outside our window. Mrs. Cornish has filled a shelf there with pots of yellow and purple crocuses; there are some exquisite white ones, too, and a few delicate primroses. It is very sweet to look at them; but it seems strange to be having Winter and Winter flowers in January. I think I like best to watch the delicate blue-green of the slender snowdrop stems making their way out of the brown mould, and hanging down their white bells as if the stalk were too fine to hold them erect. The primrose leaves, too, are so exquisite. When they come out all freshly unrolled, they are like the delicate network inside a dear little baby's hand.

Our baby has been sent away, lest it should disturb Mrs. Dayrell. I did not think I should miss the merry little darling so much; but it is such a dear little time-

waster. Madame La Peyre never likes it to come into the parlour. I do not think she is very fond of babies; but I often used to see Angélique carrying our pet in her arms, and I always stopped to play with it a few minutes as I went in and out. I wonder if trouble, and tears, and vexations will come to it some day.

Till now I have scarcely had time or will to reason out my father's letter. morning it presses on my heart like lead. Disobedience to a parent feels like sin, and yet I consider that, loving Eugène as I do, it would be wicked to think of myself as married to Captain Brand. I am willing to bear my own faults. I love Eugène of my own free will; and if this is wrong, I will bear any suffering that may come But I was married without my from it. That was not my fault; I had nowill. thing to do with it. I was like a doll, or an automaton; and I will not make that which was only a weakness into sin and

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misery. If my father knew about Eugène, surely he would change his opinion.

I do not know what to do. Shall I write to Captain Brand, and tell him all the truth?—this will set me free from this horrible deceit and concealment. But how can I confess to him or to anyone that I love Eugène?—No, no, no; the very thought scorches my face with shame; and, besides, even if I could get courage to say it, Captain Brand does not think of me as a woman—he is so calm, and cold-blooded, and reasonable, he will answer, "You are only a child; you don't know your own mind. By the time I come back to live in England, you will have grown to like me."

"Yes; there is no use in trying to deceive myself, but that is the calm, commonsense view Captain Brand will take; and that is the calm, common-sense life he means me to lead. I cannot and I will not lead it!

All at once, as I reach this point, I remember my last idea about Captain Brand; that he no longer cares about being married to me, and may perhaps wish himself free to marry some one else. If this is so, it is better to appeal to him, and not to my father. Madame La Peyre says she expects him in February, and he has promised to write beforehand and announce his arrival. I will wait till February, by that time I shall, I hope, have seen Eugène, and then I will write and tell him exactly what I feel; and ask him not to see me again, but to try and get this marriage set aside.

Just as 1 made this resolution, Madame La Peyre came back.

"Well," I said eagerly, "is it all right? is it her husband?"

"Ah, my dear child, I cannot tell you. Barbara has told me to go away, and Angélique also. She will not speak before us. I have been waiting for Mr. Howard, but he is still with her."

I forgot my dread of seeing Mr. Howard in my eagerness about this story acting under my eyes. I felt intensely interested in Mr. and Mrs. Dayrell.

We had not to wait long for Mr. Howard. He came in looking so benevolent and so delighted to see me that I lost some of my shrinking.

"Ah! how are you, my dear child." He shook both my hands heartily. "You are less surprised to see me than I was to hear that you were in Merdon. I told you that my home was in the south of England."

- "I remember now," I said.
- "And how is Captain Brand?"
- I flushed crimson.
- "I have not seen him lately."

And then dear Madame La Peyre came to my help, and said several pleasant sentences to Mr. Howard, in that charming, graceful way which makes her so different from any one I ever saw. If I had been born in France, I could perhaps have answered

Mr. Howard easily and sweetly, instead of turning red and looking cross. It must be so pleasant to have by nature a manner that is always sweet and courteous, and yet which has the air of perfect sincerity. Madame La Peyre is so simple. Mrs. Tracey's politeness is a very poor imitation; as much like the original as a French translation of one of Shakespeare's plays is.

Mr. Howard is not quick-witted or graceful; he is very downright and abrupt.

"Do you expect the Captain down again soon? I should so like to see him," he turned to me almost while Madame La Peyre was speaking.

I wanted to put an end to his questions, but I did not know what to say.

"No," I said coldly; "but really I know very little about him. I have only seen him once since he brought me to Madame La Peyre."

There was a silence. I think Mr. Howard was perplexed by my answer. Madame

La Peyre began at once to question him about Mrs. Dayrell.

"I think your doctor has frightened you," he said gravely. "Mrs. Dayrell does not appear to me to be so very ill. I should not leave her much alone with her own fancies, if she were in my charge. Adieu, Madame, I will see her again soon."

And then he hurried off. He resisted all Madame's persuasions to repose himself a few moments. "Mrs. Tracey is waiting," he said. He looked very earnestly at me, as he shook hands, as if he wished to say something; then he stopped and chatted an instant with the poor sick man in the inglenook; told Mrs. Cornish, laughingly, that her floors wanted rolling; and then went off smiling, through the pig-yard. I felt relieved when he was quite out of sight.

"That is a good man," Madame said; "but he is more brusque than Mr. Tracey is."

"Ah! but he is sincere; I am sure he is.

May I go and see Mrs. Dayrell to-day?"
"We will consult Angélique;" and again
I saw the unwilling look on Madame La
Peyre's face.

I think it is this unwillingness of Madame's that makes me care to go and see Mrs. Dayrell. What a strange feeling opposition is; but I suppose there is good It is not that I want everyone to agree with me—it is impossible all can think alike; but, certainly, I generally feel in opposition to received ideas. ceived ideas are so dull, and faded, and monotonous, there is nothing new or fresh Besides, without opposition, in them. there would be less power of improvement. I begin to believe that opposition is a necessity, and that without it life would be insupportable; it gives the glow and variety needful to existence. One sees this even in such a thing as a Devonshire brook; if there were not those lumps of granite to fight, and struggle, and foam against, the

water would grow dull from mere sluggishness; instead of which, it gets rid of weeds and other stray visitors, as it fights and dashes itself against the stones, and comes out brighter and clearer from the foam.

But I had the prudence to await Angélique's counsel, and when she came downstairs and heard Madame La Peyre's doubt about my visit I was rewarded.

"Pourquoi non?" says Angélique, and then her cheery eyes search my face and comprehend the state of matters.

"Allons, Mademoiselle, Madame will like to have a visit as soon as she has rested a little, but it will not perhaps be to-day. It is wonderful to see the change in Madame Dayrell," she says to her mistress; "even the voice of our poor Madame is stronger. I have not seen her look so happy since she has come here."

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. DAYRELL'S ADVICE.

I WAS not allowed to see Mrs. Dayrell that day or the next—not till she had had another long talk with Mr. Howard. Madame La Peyre and I were out walking when he came, and I was not sorry to miss him.

I was surprised to see the change in the invalid. The feverish look had left her face, and I saw what a beautifying power hope is; the haughty curl had loosened from her mouth, her eyes even looked smaller and more at rest. There was impatience, however, in her voice. "You can go now, ma mère, and do not come back while Miss Gertrude is here."

Angélique went, and then the still wild blue eyes fixed on me with an eagerness that filled me with fear; there was so much consciousness in the look they gave.

"First, I am going to tell you something which will please you. Angélique says that you"—a blush flickered on her face—"little busy-body that you are, have taken great interest in my affairs, and you know that your friend Mr. Howard has brought me good news." She paused for breath; she had spoken faster than I had ever heard her speak before. "What do you say, Gertrude—are you ready to go back to Normandy? I am going."

I looked at her in wonder; there was a strength in her voice, and a light in her eyes, which made me think she was really fit to travel—this woman, who a few days ago seemed dying, and over whom Madame La Peyre had been shedding so many tears; and to whom I had thought I was saying good-bye for ever. But her words opened a prospect of escape, and took me back at once to myself.

"I should like to go back to Normandy very much." I did not know what more to say, because Mrs. Dayrell had never spoken to me of her husband. Her lips curled with the old bitterness for a moment.

"There are some things which look best at a distance. I remember a line in an old poet I read when I was your age, Gertrude; it is full of truth—

'Tis expectation makes a blessing dear.'

Perhaps you will find Normandy dull, child; but at least I have something to look forward to. I did not think life had any excitement left in it."

She paused, and a gentler, more pensive look came into her eyes. I felt relieved. I had had a mingled feeling in asking to see Mrs. Dayrell. I dreaded that Mr.

Howard might have told my secret, and I did not want her to know it.

I must have looked graver than usual. I know I have felt grave, and much older, since my father's letter came.

"What ails you, child?" said Mrs. Dayrell, looking keenly at me. "You are dull and ill; your eyes have lost all their brightness. I believe I am the gayest of the two, after all; selfish people are always younglooking, you know; they never burden themselves with the anxieties and cares of others; but I am not wholly selfish, Gertrude—at least, not this morning. I am in harmony with the whole world just now, and happiness gives wisdom sometimes, and I want to speak to you about yourself while my wise mood lasts. Sit down. I never can speak while you stand looking as if you were ready to run away."

For an instant I thought I would run away. I knew by instinct what was coming, and I could not trust myself to talk of that to Mrs. Dayrell. Madame La Peyre's gentleness and courtesy, and perhaps a certain reverence I felt for her, kept me somewhat in check, even about Captain Brand; and although Angélique was only a servant, there was an indescribable power in her which enforced self-control on me; but with Mrs. Dayrell I felt no outward help, in her presence all the lawless, rebellious part of my nature stirred—nothing in her appealed to my reverence—only the affection I had got to feel for her, and simple fear of doing her harm by agitation had more than once kept me from open disagreement with her.

I sat down when my brief struggle was over, and she began:

"Mr. Howard has told me about your voyage home, Gertrude. I suppose you had been warned against confiding in me; but you might have trusted me. I have half a mind to be angry that you have not told me what it seems even

Angélique knows—I mean your marriage."

She waited a little before she said these last words. I hardly felt angry. A circle was closing round me; a feeling more like despair than anger whispered, "You will not free yourself."

"I have not told anyone," I said, coldly. "Madame La Peyre told Angélique."

I did not look at Mrs. Dayrell, but I felt that her eyes were still fixed on me.

"My poor child," she said softly. "And yet I am the confidente you should have chosen."

I opened my eyes in surprise, and she flushed.

"Not because I am good or prudent, but because I can sympathise with your feeling, with your independence and your self-will. You and I are strong on the wing, Gertrude; and such birds pine in any cage."

There was such a touch of sympathy in her voice that I glanced at her quickly. She held out her thin hand; I kissed it, and I saw real affection in her eyes. Even at that moment I wondered how it got there; it did not seem in harmony with the rest of the haughty, hectic face.

"I had nothing to confide," I said. "I was only unhappy, and I did not want to talk about it to anyone."

"You are right; there is no use in talking to those who cannot understand your feelings. Madame La Peyre and Angélique are good—good as possible; but, remember, they have never known real love, and so they cannot sympathise. There are a great many things, Gertrude, which may be guessed at, imagined, and so on; but no one knows anything about Love who has not felt it."

Her eyes were searching my face so inquiringly that the cold apathy left me. I felt a warm glow rush over me, and I knew that it showed on my cheeks.

"Now, child, do not harden yourself," she went on, pleadingly. "Now that all

the first difficulties of your confession are taken out of your way, tell me why you are unhappy. Is this husband ugly, or stern, or foolish—or what is the objection? Or do you wish to remain unmarried?"

I thought the last question sounded mocking.

"Yes; while I am so young I am not fit to be married," I said, stubbornly. And then I saw that Mrs. Dayrell had spoken truly when she said she understood me. She only stroked my hand as it lay on the bed and said,

"Yes; I told you I could feel for you. You are too young. It was very hard to tie you up before you had seen the world with your own eyes; it was a great mistake."

"You must not blame my mother," I said hastily, and then stopped, checked by the remembrance that I had done this myself.

There was a pause, and I began to

consider. I do not think this is the kind of sympathy that will help me. "Seeing the world" cannot make any difference in love. Eugène is almost the first man of my own age I have spoken to, and I cared for him almost at once. I do not believe in a love which can keep itself ungiven till it has the counsel of worldly experience to guide its choice.

"Perhaps I mean that I prefer to choose for myself, and "—I looked instinctively round, but the words came out in spite of the reserve I wanted to keep up—"I will not have a husband unless I can love him."

I felt my eyes flash. As she will talk on this unpleasant subject it is best to let her know at once that my mind is made up. She is safe; she will not reveal confidence, I feel sure.

"But, Gertrude, this comes to exactly what I was saying; as you do not bring either of the objections I name against your husband, your unhappiness is to be cured, and I am going to tell you how."

A sudden rush of hope warmed me; I clasped her thin hand between mine.

"Will you?—can you? Tell me what it is; but be sure you do not mistake."

I saw Mrs. Dayrell start and flush, and my voice sounded very strange to myself. When I was a child I was taken once to Government House to see a play, and the lady who acted the heroine spoke in that strained voice at the end. Mrs. Dayrell did not answer at once; she drew her hand away quietly, and put it over her eyes to shade them while she looked keenly at me.

"I will not mistake purposely. But, Gertrude, you puzzle me; you are so changed. Tell me, have you seen this husband since you came here?"

I bent my head.

"Ah! I noticed that you did not come to me, and that Madame La Peyre was quiet and oppressed. Poor Eugénie! she cannot keep a secret thoroughly; the restraint is more than she can bear. But now listen, child. There is no use in seeing this husband every now and then, and all the while keeping up a feeling of dislike. Do as I tell you. Ask him to keep away for a year or so; and, by the time he comes back, if you have no personal prejudice against him, you will be able to love him."

If I did not care for Eugène I must have believed her, she was so earnest.

"I can never, never do that," I said, in a passion of misery; "it is too late."

As those wide, wondering blue eyes met mine I saw that I had betrayed myself, and I buried my face on Mrs. Dayrell's pillow.

There is a long silence. At last I leave off thinking of my own misery, for a sudden thought has come to me that perhaps Mrs. Dayrell has fainted. No. She is lying vol. II.

quietly; but there is a look of deep thought in her eyes.

"Gertrude," she said softly, "that Mr. Howard must be a good man. I believe he has been of more use to me than the doctor has. All these months I have been longing for peace. I have lived in a perpetual hopeless struggle with myself and with everyone. I cannot, even now, say which is the real condition of my mind. Very possibly," she laughed, as if she were trying to make light of her own seriousness, "by to-morrow I may have gone back to the old state again, and may talk to you as I used to do. But to-day I seem to see life with more calmness and hope than I ever thought to see it, and I feel able to comfort you, child. I think you have been dealt with unwisely—unfairly, even; but it is done, and you should try to make the best of what has happened. It seems to me you cannot free yourself; but you can make your lot much harder. That which now

appears to you necessary to your happiness, and an eternal obstacle between you and your husband, may be only an unreal fancy. Child," she went on, earnestly, her face flushed, and she held my hand firmly in hers, "I can speak to you out of real experience—not out of a maxim-book of things as they should be. You love: but it may be that your love is not placed worthily—that it is only trifled with; it may be, too-and from all Mr. Howard told me I think it is-that you have been married to an admirable husband, whose good qualities you cannot yet see because of the prejudice created by the haste of your marriage; and yet he may be able to make you happy, spite of yourself. Well, Gertrude, take this warning-happiness is no easy thing to get; and as I lie here I see that our own way and our own efforts do not bring it, and we may tear in pieces and fling away our real life while we strive to have our own will in what is simply impossible. My dear child, do not throw away the substance for the shadow."

I listened in wonder; this was very different talk from that which troubled me so the day I met Captain Brand.

"Thank you for your advice; you are very kind,"—I drew my hand away—" but you are quite mistaken about me. If I were to try even to love Captain Brand, I should commit a great sin, and something dreadful might happen."

"Why will you not wholly trust me?" she said, impatiently; "you are so young that you are capable of deceiving yourself, and of being deceived. Who is this person you prefer to your husband?"

I cannot sit still and be questioned about Eugène. I start up.

"Do not ask me—I cannot tell you; it is useless; no one can help me but myself, and I do not want to trouble anyone."

I almost ran to the door, and got away before she could speak again.

CHAPTER XV.

AGAIN AT CHATEAU FONTAINE.

WE have been a week at Château Fontaine, and our life in the Devonshire village already begins to seem far off and unsubstantial. I was so very impatient to get away from Merdon that at last I counted the hours; and then I was so anxious to be at Château Fontaine again that our slow rate of journeying was very tiresome. But the doctor said Mrs. Dayrell was scarcely fit to travel at all; and, indeed, spite of our slow progress, she has been quite ill ever since our arrival, and is still too exhausted to see anyone. I am

glad not to see her yet; I want to wipe out of my memory all that happened in those last miserable days—Frank Newton's mistake and Mr. Donald's folly; for, although I am still miserable about it for his sake, it was very foolish of him to misunderstand me; then my father's letter; and, worst of all, the meeting with Mr. Howard, and the certainty that my marriage will be known and spoken of. Whenever this remembrance comes it brings such a sharp torture that I could almost jump into the Seine to get away from it. It comes now, and I scamper downstairs, in the hope of meeting with some distraction.

As I come down—not that little spiral staircase, I have a nice, pretty room on the same floor as the salon now—I meet Rosalie half-way. She was very civil to me the day after our arrival; but she soon grew spiteful again—I cannot conquer my dislike to her.

"Aha!"—she grins in such a disagreeable way—" Mademoiselle has her hat, she is going out early again."

I nod, and pass on. Why does Rosalie watch me?—what business is it of hers whether I go out early or late? I believe it is because her freckles and her light eyelashes remind me of a horrid story I once read that after I leave her I shudder, and wish that she were not at Château Fontaine. I peep into the Abbé's room—I am to use it as my study—there is a bright fire there. Madame La Peyre talks of getting a professor to come over from Rouen and give me lessons, and I think I shall like this. I am sure I like the plan of having this dear little room all to myself. What long letters I shall write to Eugène!

I have been out very little since I came, there has been a great deal of rain and sleet; but I have renewed acquaintance with much that I saw before. To-day I mean to row myself in that dear little boat; or, at least, to sit in it.

Just outside the door, at the top of the double flight of steps, I meet Matthieu face to face. I like Matthieu—he is very civil, and he was overpowered with joy when we all arrived at Château Fontaine. He smiles now, in a most delighted fashion.

"Is there something I can do for Mam's selle?—will Mam's elle tell me if she wants anything?" And he stands staring, with his mouth open.

"No, thank you." And then I pass on into the winding path through the shrub-bery.

Instead of going round to the back of the Château, and down to the river, through the hanging wood, I believe it is quickest to go instead to the place where Eugène landed me, near the concierge's cottage. The old walnut-faced concierge is sitting at his door, smoking;

but I pretend not to see him, and I take a long curve across the grass, which carries me well beyond the cottage, with its staring white walls and green shutters, and I find myself at our landing-place under the How different it all looks! tall trees. That charming, green-suffused atmosphere has vanished with the leaves; the dragonflies and the white starry flowers have departed; there is a low, leaden-coloured sky, and the wind cries and rattles among the bare boughs overhead; the plank is there, but it is useless now, for the little threadlike stream has trebled itself in width. is all so changed that I am chilled and troubled. The glow of delight which any thought of Eugène brings is checked for the first time since I came here. In the salon, in his study, even in the dining-room where we did not speak to one another—I seem to have been living with him; and this morning, when I saw, at last, a chance

of getting down to the river, I believe I almost expected that he would suddenly appear beside me. I seem to care so much more for him than I did at Merdon.

But this chill destroys the illusion. is so long since I heard from Eugène that something may have happened. He may not be in Paris; he may have gone away travelling-but then he would have told me Did not I write to him as soon as our journey to Normandy was decided. Ah! my heart grows more troubled, and my hope is fainter; there is no longer the upspringing life in it which seems to bear me above doubt and fear. Has he forgotten me, and will he never write to me again? Shall I go on, day after day, waiting and expecting, like the poor forsaken heroine of a novel?

I feel so miserable that I shiver with cold; and yet I have wrapped a warm shawl round my shoulders. I turn abrupt-

ly from the river, and walk briskly towards the gates. I have not been down into the village. Angélique has promised to take me, as soon as she is less necessary to poor Mrs. Dayrell; but I have not seen Angélique for two whole days. I fancy Rosalie keeps us apart. She answers the bell; she seems to inhabit the staircase. I am always meeting Rosalie.

I go to the iron gates, and open one, and I look lingeringly down the steep road. A little boy is loitering just outside the gate, picking up small sticks and twigs which have fallen from the trees. He is startled when he sees me, and turns to go back to the village.

I call to him as he reaches a turn in the road; from this point it goes down, straight and steep, and the boy must have a full view of anything coming up it.

"Can you see the postman coming?" He turns round, sharply. "The postman! Mais oui. There he is; he will soon have reached the Château."

He points his brown finger beyond where I stand, and as I look back into the park I see a man hurrying along under the trees on the opposite side to the concierge's cottage. He is going very fast, for he takes long striding steps; I feel sure he has a letter for me, and I go back to the Château as quickly as I can.

I cannot overtake him. He has already reached the winding in and out paths among the shrubs, and I lose sight of him. All at once I remember the steep slippery grassed hill, and I make for that. It is not slippery now, as it was in Summer-time; the ground is sticky, but I get along fast. When I reach the terrace, there is no one in sight. I am breathless with the haste I have made, and I stand panting. A moment after, the postman emerges from the mass of shrubs, on his way to the

house. I stop him by a gesture, and he raises his cap.

"Have you a letter for Miss Gertrude Stewart?"

I try to speak with dignity, though my voice comes with a gasp. I will not take this postman into confidence; I suffered enough with old Samuel. The postman looks through his letters. There is only one for the Château, and that is for Madame La Peyre.

He passes on, and I stand there sadly enough. Was my foreboding true;—and has Eugène forgotten me? No; I must not wrong him by even a doubting thought. He will not write—he will come—he is coming. I clasp my hands over my eyes to keep in this hope. I may have stood thus for some minutes. A shrill titter rouses me, and I draw my hands away. Rosalie stands facing me;—her green, yellow-fringed eyes look more malicious than ever.

"Aha! Mam'selle has then seen our postman. And what does she think of him?"

CHAPTER XVI.

MADAME LA PEYRE'S MYSTERY.

It snows so heavily this morning, that there is not a chance of going out. But I am so happy to be in France again that this weather does not depress me as it would at Merdon. Madame La Peyre says the Château is only half the size it was before the revolution; but it seems very large to me—it is such a quaint, queer, rambling place. I have discovered another of those spiral stone staircases; so there are three—that one which leads down from my first bedroom, the one behind the bookcase in Eugène's study, and my last discovery. I have gone into that study

several times, but I cannot find the spring door. It is difficult to believe there is a door, the books look so even and regular; and I cannot inquire of Madame La Peyre, she will ask so many questions, and perhaps the whole story of Eugène will come out. I could never, never tell that to anyone; not because I like secrets, but it seems to me that our love is too sacred a thing to talk of.

We have gone back to French habits here, and I seldom see Madame La Peyre till the mid-day meal which they call breakfast. I do not feel quite so happy as usual this morning, My sleep last night was haunted by a vision of Rosalie. I dreamed that she came into the salle when we were all seated at dinner, and read aloud a letter from Eugène. I woke up in terror, and then fell asleep again, to dream that Eugène was dead.

I was glad to see the snow when I looked out of window. I did not wish to go

out; and yet I shrank from another encounter with Rosalie. My feeling towards this woman is perhaps unreal and exaggerated—the result of the lonely life of these last days; but she makes me uncomfortable. Directly she comes into the room it seems as if she changed the atmosphere by her presence. I feel sure she would do me a mischief if she could. I am sure, too, that she is jealous of me with her mother.

Madame La Peyre has so much to see after, on her return from this long absence from the Château, that some time will pass before she can fulfil her promise of taking me into the village.

I miss the dear little church at Merdon. I did not like Mr. Tracey's sermons, but it was nice to have a church to go to. I go to the little village church here. But then I feel a heretic when I am in it. The old pianoforte has not improved in my absence, but it is better than nothing; and I sit

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singing till Madame La Peyre sends to tell me breakfast is served.

Rosalie grins as she opens the salon door to let me pass out. I do not think she could smile if she tried—there is something cold and horrible in her face; as I look at her now, I see decided spitefulness in her eyes. I am so disposed to a quarrel with her, that the only safety is in silence.

- "Mam'selle is too late," she says, in a teasing, jeering way.
- "Too late for what? Is not Madame at breakfast?"
- "But pardon, that is exactly what she is doing, and she waits for Mam'selle. It is the postman for whom Mam'selle is too late this morning."

I try to look unmoved, but it is useless. Rosalie's hateful face stirs all the blood in my body. I turn my face away from her peering green eyes.

"Mam'selle has then chosen the wrong day,"she goes on, "the postman has brought nothing yesterday, and to-day he has brought two letters, and Madame has them."

I go downstairs with a desperate fear at my heart. At the door of the dining-room I pause for reflection.

Why should I be so frightened? Even if the letter is from Eugène, Madame will not read it, and I am not obliged to show it to her. Already she guesses that I care for him, but at present she need not know how much; she and Rosalie are quite different. Madame La Peyre would never be unkind, or betray me to Captain Brand. I will let things take their course; I will be quite open; I will have no more secrets, and then Rosalie cannot spy on me.

Madame gave me an arch look when I went in; Angélique stood beside her.

"Why, where do you hide yourself, Angélique?" I said. "I have scarcely seen you since we have been here. How is Mrs. Dayrell?"

"She is better, and she wishes to see

Mademoiselle; but Mademoiselle will not let her talk much "—Angélique gave me a glance full of warning—"she is so weak that she should hardly speak at all."

"You had better stay in the room, then, you dear old fidget, and regulate the number of words we speak."

Angélique smiled in that grave fashion which I always feel a reproof.

"It is," she went on, as if speaking to herself, "that my poor Madame is so full of expectation that she cannot rest or sleep with enjoyment, and every little thing which excites her makes her so tired."

"But have you not any fresh news?" I looked from Angélique to Madame La. Peyre.

"Not yet; but Gertrude"—she touched one of the letters on the table—"I have at length news from my brother the Abbé on the subject, and he promises to take means to find out Henri, and to bring him to Barbara; and when the Père de Nivières undertakes to do anything, it will be done, if it is possible."

"Then we shall soon see Monsieur l'Abbé." I felt in a glow of delight.

"Yes, I hope so. Why, how pleased thou art!" she smiled. "I must tell him what a friend he has in thee; but I have another pleasure in store for thee, my child—a surprise."

Madame and Angélique were looking anxiously at me, and then Madame La Peyre's eyes turned to the other letter which lay before her. I made an effort to speak coolly. The crisis had come, and I must get through it the best way I could; no one here has any real control over me.

"Is that letter for me, Madame?"

What an absurd organ is a voice!—why cannot it be the same under all circumstances?—why must shyness or agitation of any kind make it hoarse and rough? I hear the strange sound myself; no wonder they look at me with deepened interest.

"Did you, then, expect a letter?" says Madame; there is such a provoking consciousness in her face. If she were a safe confidante, and if she were alone, perhaps I could confess all to her; but Angélique must never know about my correspondence with Eugène. I cannot lose her good opinion. I fear she has never thought so well of me since I told her about Mr. Donald.

Madame gets tired of waiting for an answer, so she goes on speaking.

"Perhaps the letter should be for you, but you must forgive the writer. He had to ask my permission to come here, and he may have wished to take you by surprise; but then young men and old women do not always judge alike."

I wish Madame La Peyre would speak out. Is it Eugène who is coming? Oh, yes; it can be no one else. I yield to the dear certainty, and turn away to hide my face. Now the secret of his silence is explained; he has not written because he wishes to take me by surprise. My heart beats so fast that I cannot speak; I fancy they must see it beating.

"But you do not ask when your visitor is coming, my little one. I am so glad you look so well. I begin to think, Gertrude, that the air of Normandy suits you better than Devonshire did."

A sudden chill falls on me. Why does Madame speak of Devonshire? Does she mean Frank Newton? And yet she knows nothing. Mrs. Dayrell's illness absorbed us all so much, and after that the preparations for departure, that I never had need or opportunity to tell Madame La Peyre of Frank Newton's message, or about Mr. Donald. And I believe there was no need, for Mr. Newton left his card a day or two afterwards, to inquire for Mrs. Dayrell, and to say that he was going to travel. Is he travelling in Normandy, and is

he coming to ask me to marry him? "Who is this visitor, Madame?" I say, impatiently. "I do not want visitors—unless, indeed, it is your brother."

"My brother will come all in good time, but this visitor comes first." She laughs, in her soft, pleasant way; but I cannot even smile, every nerve is tingling with impatience. "I do not understand you, Gertrude, you are so changeable. Just now you looked so pleased, as if you guessed at your visitor, and I was glad to see you look happy, my child; but now there is a cloud on your face. What makes you so whimsical, little one?"

All this while Angélique has kept silence; now she takes a dish of fish and hands it to me. They are little fish, fastened in a bundle, and I do not like them; but I feel embarrassed, so I take some on my plate.

"I am hungry, I suppose, Madame."

Having said this, I feel bound to eat the nasty little fish.

I glance up suddenly; Angélique is looking at Madame La Peyre in a very deprecating manner.

"I will go and see how Madame is," she says, "and then I will come back for Mademoiselle."

Madame La Peyre places the letter before me; but she is certainly very childish, she puts it face downwards.

"You would not guess before Angélique, Gertrude, but you might have trusted her; I tell la mère Angélique all my secrets. Now I shall leave you to read the letter by yourself; I must go and give orders to Rosalie to prepare a room."

I waited till she had gone, and then I turned the letter over with a shrinking dislike; something had taken away my first hope, and had told me the truth. Yes, there was the clear, firm handwriting I expected to see, and, when I looked at the end of the letter, the signature "George Brand." I am caught in a trap. I had

decided to write to Captain Brand, and tell him my feelings; but then I wanted first to see Eugène again, and learn from him how I was to act; and, if Captain Brand had waited a little longer, I should have seen Eugène and told him the whole truth as I can never write it, and I should have known what to do. There is no time now, and I cannot write to Eugène till he has told me where to send a letter. He has left Paris by this time.

The only hope is that he is on his way here with the Abbé. Something may delay Captain Brand. If he is delayed, he will meet Eugène here; it will be terrible for me to see them together, though it must bring about my freedom. I have never acknowledged Captain Brand as my husband. Therefore he has no right to blame my love for Eugène.

I read the letter, and put it down with a troubled face. He will come to-day.

He says so positively; and, worse than all, I see that he cares more for me than I thought he did. I seem to be constantly in his thoughts. It is foolish to himself, and very tormenting to me, that we should meet again. I am rejoiced to see that he can only stay three days; I shall see as little of him as possible, and as soon as he leaves I will write and tell him everthing.

I feel freer, more courageous here than I did at Merdon. Eugène seems nearer, partly because there is so much to remind me of him, and also because I live in a daily expectation of seeing him. I wish Madame La Peyre would let me read that dear old Abbé's letter. There must be something about Eugène in it. I do not know why I called the Abbé dear—he was a veritable dragon when I was here before.

" Mam'selle!"

It is the squeaky voice of Matthieu, and he is standing looking at me with a most ridiculous expression of countenance. Perhaps Matthieu can hardly be said to have a countenance, it is rather a face with features on it; his head is on one side, his lipless mouth is wide open, making circular grooves at each corner, and his dull, leaden eyes are fixed on me with a look in them that is indescribable in its want of expression.

"What do you want?" I begin to think I dislike French servants; there is so much more freedom in their ways than in those we are used to.

"Pardon, Mam'selle, but it is the sick lady, Madame Dayrell, who demands Mam'selle. It is la mère Angélique who has come to tell me this. Dame, I was sound asleep!"

He laughed as if it were an achievement to be sound asleep so early in the afternoon, but I felt disgusted. All the women in the Château worked hard; only this lazy fellow took his ease, and left his work to be done by others.

"Very well; you can tell Angélique I am coming."

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE BRINK.

A NGÉLIQUE is waiting at the door. She holds it open, and then she opens another, and I find myself in a cheerful-looking square room, panelled in white wood, with tapestry half way between floor and ceiling.

I do not see the bed at first, for it stands sheltered within an alcove, and is screened by muslin curtains. So I look round me. I never saw a bed-room so like a sitting-room; the floor is of some dark wood, polished and slippery, and there are several little rugs lying about, one by the bedside,

and another in front of an old yellow-brown velvet sofa. Some of the chairs and the window-curtains are also of this sad colour—it is hardly yellow, it is more like tea-leaves, or a faded leaf, but the room is not dull-looking, the mirrors take away any sadness of aspect. There are four of them, set in old-fashioned black and gold frames, a quaint armoire, also in black and gold, with queer twisted pillars at the corners, and a round table with black legs and a marble top. In my room there is a marble table, but the other furniture is modern—there is none of this quaint, grave harmony there.

Angélique, in her close-fitting plain black gown and apron, her snowy cap, with its broad strings, and her light red-brown face and hands, is wonderfully in keeping with her surroundings.

"Is it you, Gertrude?"

I start from my contemplation, and look behind the muslin curtains. Mrs. Dayrell lies outside the bed, propped up by several pillows. She is so very pale, so very wasted, that to me she looks worse than she did that day at Merdon, when she was thought to be dying. Her hair is bound up and rolled into a loose coil at the back of her head. Her blue eyes are still bright and eager, but the brightness is not so hard, there is a subdued look on the face, and yet the eagerness is there still. I had forgotten much of my last talk with her—but her first words brought everything back vividly.

"Well, my rebellious child," she smiled kindly, "have you bowed your neck to the yoke?" I gave her an imploring look. "Angélique," she said, "if you are so wilful that you will not leave us alone together, put yourself in that window and do the part of Sister Anne—tell us when you see anyone coming. You have the full command of the terrace, so you can amuse yourself to your heart's content." There

was the old scoff in her voice, but, though she spoke faintly, there was none of the difficulty of utterance I had noticed the last time I saw her.

Angélique went straight to the window, and Mrs. Dayrell's eyes followed her. Then she fixed them earnestly on my face. "Do you remember where we left off, Gertrude, when you ran away?"

She said it naturally, as if our talk had just been interrupted, and we were about to take it up again; but after the first startled moment, I recovered my recollectedness.

"If you please, I do not want to begin that conversation again." I looked frankly at her. "I am not ungrateful for your interest in me—but let us talk of something brighter than my troubles; why not of Mr. Dayrell?"

It was her turn to blush—a kind of strange beauty shone out of her face, and her eyes drooped like those of a young girl. There was a silence.

"Gertrude"—she spoke without looking at me—"I am about the strongest warning I could preach. You see me lying here too weak to move from my bed—too weak to be left unwatched, and yet happy at last—happy in the hope that I shall once more see my husband; and I tell you not to do as I have done. You have youth and health; while you have these give your love to the man who loves you. Ah, if you knew what it is to long to have youth and health once more!"—she said this almost with a wail.

"I am not to allow you to tire yourself," I said, as I bent and kissed her, "so we must not argue, or I could say that you contradict what you said to me before. I want you to tell me of some nice old women to go and see in the village, who will tell me stories. Though we have been here five days, I have seen no one out of the house but the old concierge."

She shook her head at me, and I knew

she meant reproof, but she had no strength to resist.

"Perhaps old Matthieu is about as amusing as any one in Fontaine," she said, "provided you can understand his toothless talk, and can succeed in escaping when you have had enough of it. He and his son are good representatives of Frenchmen of their class. Our Matthieu, here, is lazy and foolish, and his father has wits enough for three concierges."

"Do you know Rosalie?" I lowered my voice; but I fancied that Angélique's shoulders moved at the sound of her daughter's name. Mrs. Dayrell raised her hand in warning.

"I know this much of her—if you offend her she will find means to punish you for it. They think"—she looked towards Angélique—"that such a poor half-witted creature could not do harm—and would not if she could. But I remember I thought

very differently before I was married. She heard me say she was ugly one day, and I believe she has never forgiven me. She played me several spiteful tricks."

"She is more than ugly—she is hideous."
Mrs. Dayrell smiled.

"She is just the sort of woman to be touchy about her looks. But listen; Angélique, is there not some one coming along the drive?"

How quick her ears were! The drive came at the side of the house, ended on the right of the winding shrubbery, and I had not heard wheels. I saw Mrs. Dayrell's fingers twitching together as she waited for an answer.

Angélique stayed at the window a little while, and then came up to the bed.

"Yes, Madame, there is a carriage coming. But it is possibly a visitor for Miss Gertrude. I will go and see."

My heart beat fast. I wished myself in the wood beyond the river. It would not be easy for Captain Brand to find me there.

Mrs. Dayrell lay still, with closed eyelids. Her suspense was so supreme that I doubt if she understood the meaning of Angélique's words.

As I stood watching her, I felt selfish and ashamed of myself. I had forgotten her anxiety in my own. Here was a woman, seemingly at the end of her life, who for months, for years, perhaps, had been unhappy through her own fault; and now she was waiting for the only happiness she cared for—the sight of her husband; and also for the opportunity of owning her fault—for I guessed that she had repented her wilfulness, whatever it might be.

"And she may die before he comes, broken-hearted by her long waiting," I said to myself.

"Gertrude,"—I started, for I had forgotten how near she was—" if this visitor should be your husband, I wish to see him."

She smiled at my dismay; I suppose it was very visible.

"I shall do no mischief, child,—good, rather, I think. Why, Gertrude, when—when Henri arrives, I shall want you to be friends with him."

It was a relief to see the door open. It was Angélique; but I saw in her face that the visitor was not Captain Brand.

"It is only Monsieur and Madame Dupont from Saint Antoine; but Madame wishes to present Mademoiselle to them."

"It is nothing but a ruse of yours, you tiresome old woman!" says her patient. "And I believe, Gertrude, you are as anxious to get away as la mère is to take you. I suppose it is wearisome to be cooped up with an invalid."

I try to interrupt her; I am ready to cry at her accusation, but she points to the door. I catch her hand as it drops on the bed, and kiss it.

"You know it is not wearisome," I say,

vehemently. And then Angélique touches my arm, and I hurry away. She stops outside the door.

"Mademoiselle does not keep her promise. My poor Madame will have a so feverish night, and it will be the fault of Mademoiselle."

"Well, I can't help it, Angélique. I am sorry, but your Madame teases me, and then I forget prudence. I dare say she provokes you sometimes?"

Angélique's grave smile is on her lips.

"I am only a nurse, and Mademoiselle knows a nurse would not be much use who thought of her own feelings instead of her patient. But, though Madame is not the patient of Mademoiselle, I must ask Mademoiselle to be so kind as to think only of her whenever she sees her."

She left me abruptly; she had never spoken so boldly before, and I felt very much ashamed of my irritation.

"It is very troublesome to have to go

and see these people," I say, crossly, to myself, as I open the salon door—the dread of seeing Captain Brand, and the longing to put off our meeting as long as possible, have made me very exacting this morning.

The sight of the visitors is soothing they look comic. Madame La Peyre, full of smiles and graciousness, is sitting in a stiff, high-backed chair, and her visitors sit opposite; the lady, very upright, with an old-fashioned bonnet, and a drabcoloured umbrella lined with brown; the gentleman in a very close-fitting blue coat and drab gaiters. I thought French people dressed well and fashionably: these look as if they had come out of an oldfashioned picture. The lady's shawl is put on very well, and the colours of her dress go well with her bonnet; but these points excepted, she is like one of the old-fashioned farmers' wives who used to go to Merdon Church. She has a flat face, with a straight, salient nose, and large, pale blue eyes—not so much a stupid face as a face through which expression has filtered, but which is powerless to retain any. As the door opens and I come in, her eyes move slightly, and then return to a fixed gaze at Madame La Peyre. But the gentleman sitting beside her jumps up, takes the handle of the door from me, makes me a low bow, gives me a chair, and then seats himself with a glibness which dazzles my observation. However, I see enough to make out that he is a small man, with a lean, hatchet-shaped face, and a black beard; he has a yellow skin, and his small, restless, twinkling black eyes are for ever moving.

Madame La Peyre presents me with a charming little preciseness to her visitors. The lady curtsies graciously. When Monsieur Dupont has finished his bows he says, "Mademoiselle is from Australia; does she find Normandy to her taste?"

I say I like Normandy, and then I ask if Monsieur has ever been in England.

"But no, I have not had the pleasure," he shrugs his shoulders, and droops the corners of his mouth; "but Madame Dupont has been there—yes, she has seen London, and the Abbey of Westminster, and the Lord Mayor; she has seen all that is to be seen in England."

While he speaks he nods and looks at his wife, as if she were a huge wax-doll and he were showman; and at the end he rubs his hands contentedly, and looks at me. I smile.

"Madame has seen more than I have. I only know a small country village in England."

"Tiens! but this is extraordinary. Dost thou hear this, Madame Dupont?"

I observe that Madame's eyes travel to my face, and then go back again to Madame La Peyre.

"You will have visitors, Madame, in a

little while," Monsieur Dupont says. Madame La Peyre gives a little nervous start, but she smiles and says—

"Yes, Monsieur, I expect my brother, the Abbé."

"Ah! and he brings a visitor. Is it not so, Madame Dupont?" says the small husband. I feel my face is burning and tingling, and I see Madame La Peyre's hand trembling as it lies so white and soft on the arm of her chair, and yet one or other of us is suffering all this agitation for nothing, for he may either mean Mr. Dayrell or Eugène.

Madame La Peyre looks inquiring. Madame Dupont's eyes rest calmly on her small restless spouse.

"My sister says that Monsieur de Vaucresson has told her that he is going to see some friends at Château Fontaine, but she does not speak of the Abbé, my friend," and she once more settles her blue eyes on her hostess. I can see trouble and disappointment in the face of Madame La Peyre, and yet she goes on smiling at her visitors. The cloud that weighed so heavily over me has suddenly lifted. I should like to sing and dance, and laugh out loudly, to get rid, in some outward way, of the joy that is almost choking me. That stiff, flat-faced woman is transformed—I feel quite friendly towards her.

"Yes, yes," her husband says, "it is Monsieur de Vaucresson who comes, and I hope, Madame, that when you do us the honour of visiting us at St. Antoine, you will bring Monsieur le Comte—he is a fine young man, I hear, and is very much admired—he ought to make a good marriage."

"His mother will take care of that. No doubt that is arranged."

Madame Dupont's phrases are uttered like oracles. Her husband rubs his hands and looks at her with delight; he nods his head gently.

"You hear, Madame, what my wife has said, and she is never wrong—never; his mother will take care of that—has taken care of it, without doubt. Ancient families, such as the De Vaucressons, betroth children in their cradle—it would not surprise me, not at all,"—he puts his head on one side, and half closes his eyes, looking so consciously sagacious that I long to pinch him—"on the contrary, I shall expect to hear that Monsieur le Comte is so betrothed."

He darts a quick glance at his wife, but she sits in placid silence—as if she listened to his remarks in tolerating pity—ready to come in and set them straight when they deviate from fact.

"I am not acquainted with the family—I only know Monsieur de Vaucresson as my brother's pupil," says Madame La Peyre, with a change of voice which tells me that the subject is distasteful to her. "But, Madame, how are the cows and the poultry?"

This question seems to rouse Madame Dupont. "The calves have prospered, I thank you, Madame, but the poultry have failed." And then she bends forward to Madame La Peyre, and explains causes, advising her, among other counsels, to feed laying hens on snails.

While I am smiling at her important manner, I hear a distant sound of wheels. This is undoubtedly Captain Brand, and I cannot escape. Monsieur Dupont has just begun to cross-question me about Australia, which he evidently confounds with California. I make helpless efforts to enlighten him; I am first hot and then cold; I do not know what I am saying.

"No horses!—mon Dieu!"—Monsieur Dupont's eyebrows are like the arches of a bridge—"but this is indeed a strange piece of natural history, which I will communicate to Madame Dupont when she has ended with the chickens; tiens, tiens, but it is singular that there are no horses in Australia."

I try feebly to contradict this assertion; but I feel confused and dizzy, for I hear an arrival below, and I know that Captain Brand is coming upstairs.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNWELCOME TÊTE-À-TÊTE.

Twas almost horrible to feel so inclined to cry and laugh at once. Captain Brand came up and shook my hand with such open delight in his face that I felt cross as well as confused. That absurd Monsieur Dupont went through a pantomime of bows, suggestive of a monkey salaaming an elephant. Madame Dupont was calmly majestic. She let her eyes rest on Captain Brand's tall figure with a glance that might mean approval or patronage—if there is such a sensation as cold pleasure, I should say that it was an habitual one with this lady.

Captain Brand seated himself, and then Madame Dupont's face showed a warmer shade of interest as she turned it to Madame La Peyre.

"You will remember, Madame, that the snails must be boiled," she said.

I was sitting opposite Captain Brand. He smiled, but I would not laugh; I thought in my contradiction that he ought not to do so, and I turned away to talk to Monsieur Dupont.

"Yes, yes, it is true—Madame Dupont knows; the chickens are gourmands," he says. "They like their food cooked, and well cooked. Yes, yes—in England, I believe, you do not care much for the cooking; you eat the meat half roasted. Mon Dieu! I should die of hunger." He gave a shudder of disgust, but I was too much disturbed to be patriotic, and I did not contradict his assertion.

Madame Dupont rose up and glanced warningly at her much lesser half.

"We must not keep the horse, my friend—he takes cold easily, and we have far to go. We hope that Madame La Peyre and Mademoiselle will do us the honour of returning our visit."

Monsieur Dupont looked at his wife with genuine admiration. I fancy her speech was an unusually long one.

"Yes, my friend, you are quite right," he said, "we must go. Madame"—he bowed profoundly to Madame La Peyre, and then twisting round on his heels so as to face me, he bowed again—"and, Mademoiselle, I present to you my homage, and I join my prayer to that of Madame Dupont, that you will honour St. Antoine with your presence,"—Monsieur Dupont looked at the Captain, but there was no response in his face—and, finally, the little man bowed himself to the door of the salon, which he held open for his wife and Madame La Peyre.

I was in such terror at the idea of being

left alone with Captain Brand that I went after them to the door of the salon, in the hope of escape.

"Stay here till I come back, Gertrude." Madame La Peyre gave me such a winning smile, and shut the door on me.

I went back to my chair, and sat down. When I parted from Captain Brand I really liked him better than I thought I ever should, and felt at ease in his society; but I was a child then. So much has happened since that I feel years older. I shrink from him much more than I did. I believe the two chief things which have caused this change in me towards him are, my father's letter, and the knowledge that I am dependent on Captain Brand.

The silence grows irksome—so irksome and unbearable that at last, in despair, I speak.

"You have come sooner than you said you would, when you were at Merdon."

I cannot look at him as I say this. I do

not want to see that he is glad to see me,. when I so shrink from him.

He brings a chair near me, and sits down.

"Yes, I have come sooner. I could not help it, Gertrude." He speaks so gently and quietly, so exactly as if he knew how perplexed I am—but I feel wicked, and this attempt at soothing is irritating. "I felt that we must talk together over your father's letter. He says he had written to you by the same post."

He pulls out a letter and gives it to me, and then he pushes his chair back a little. I longed to refuse to read it, but I could not show disrespect to my father before Captain Brand; and there might be a loophole of escape in what he had written to him.

Captain Brand got up and looked at the old cabinet, at the screens, and at last he went to the window,—while I sat trying to take in the contents of what I was reading. As I read I felt humiliated, indeed. This letter must have given Captain Brand a

very unworthy idea of my father—it was so unworthy of him, that, when I had at last read it all through, I could neither look up nor speak.

My father had been to me the model of a true gentleman—so noble, so honourable, so courteous and refined; but this letter filled me with a terrible doubt. I only knew my father in his own home, and I had seen very little of him. What if my knowledge of him was merely ideal, and if his real nature was that which lay revealed to my wounded feelings in this letter in my hand.

The patronising tone, the (as I thought) almost fulsome thanks for Captain Brand's kindness and care for us on board the Adelaide, and then, when he came to speak of money, the easiness with which he accepted obligation, and the interference he ventured on, filled me with shame—he actually named the sum which he considered should be placed by Captain Brand at

my own disposal. I thought of his letter to me; in that he said he "wished me to consider myself fortunate in marrying Captain Brand," and yet here he made Captain Brand feel that I have condescended in marrying him, and that this condescension must be paid for—just as if I am to be bought by a yearly allowance. What could I do? My lips trembled, and I felt tears coming. No, I could not speak to Captain Brand about that hateful allowance. I could spend as little as possible, and pay it all back as soon as I was free.

He came and sat down again.

"Well, Gertrude," he said, as I gave back the letter, "you have also received one?"

"Yes;" I remembered a few sentences of that letter, and I got crimson; "but I cannot show it to you, it is quite private, and——"

"There is no need; perhaps it was not necessary to show you this, only I would



not willingly keep anything from you, Gertrude; if I understand you at all, you much value frankness and candour, and I wish to place my position quite openly before you."

I felt crushed with shame. Yes, frankness and openness are just the two qualities I hoped I was gifted with. My mind seemed to go into chaos—myself in theory was such a very different being from myself in practice. What a series of wretched, despicable little deceits my life had been Still my anger was far more against Captain Brand than against myself; but for him deceit would not have been needed—he had caused all this, and he was responsible for it. I just bowed in answer, it would have been very difficult to meet his eyes without confusion, and he went on-

"After what you said to me on board the *Eclair*, I felt that though it would have gone much against my inclination—indeed it would have been a grief to me; still, if Mr. Stewart had expressed a wish to take charge of you till I was free to do so myself, I must have sent you back to him; but you see, I hope, my dear child, that this is impossible—your father does not wish you to return to him."

I sat silent, trembling with anger and fear; those words—"take charge of you myself," had made this marriage, which I would not believe in, a reality.

- "You agree with me in this?"
- "Yes," I said, in a sad, constrained voice, for I remembered too well how very distinct my father had been on this point in his letter to me.
- "Well, then, tell me frankly, Gertrude, are you happy with Madame La Peyre? My—my dear child, consider only yourself in the matter; your happiness is more important than anything else." There was such a strange tone of constraint in his voice that a new hope came.

No man who loved a woman, and cared to make her his wife, could talk in this cold matter-of-fact way about her happiness; with a few exceptions, all that I had seen of Captain Brand gave me the notion that a tiresome sense of duty inspired everything he said or did. Was his feeling for me a duty also; and was he going to have me for a wife for duty's sake, only because of his promise to my mother?"

"Captain Brand," I began; a headstrong impulse to ask for my freedom seized me. He interrupted me at once—

"If you are happy here, my dear, I amcontented to leave you. I greatly like what I have seen of Madame La Peyre, and I believe this is a pleasant part of France; but if you are not happy, I will either take you to my mother, I cannot place—my wife with a stranger;"—this in answer to the dislike which showed at once in my face;—"or there is yet another way,"—he stopped a minute, and I held my breath in an in-

tensity of expectation. Was he going to set me free? My heart beat so fast that I felt choked. He went on presently, with a sort of effort—"I think I told you that, if I take command of the ship now offered me, I must be away a year or more, but—but I can give up this ship, Gertrude, and—and"—his voice faltered till it sounded weak and timid—"I can stay in England with you."

There was no need for him to be more explicit; while he spoke I looked up quickly, in a desperate hope of finding that I was right, and that he really was indifferent.

Ah me! the revelation in his face was enough. There are things for which no words can be found, and, even when the picture is painted in words, it may entirely fail in conveying truth. There was a look of appeal—of earnest tenderness, which, all ignorant as I was, told me that he loved me.

Why did I not speak out boldly then—five minutes before, when he stopped me, the words were on my tongue, quivering with impatience to get free; and now I felt so strong a recoil—such an intense shrinking from him—that I only longed to get away. No, nothing could make me speak to Captain Brand of our marriage, or in any way acknowledge that I considered him to be my husband.

Looking back now I see my folly; a grain of cool common-sense would have saved us both, and would have spared much pain and evil-doing. My age and my ignorance, I suppose, were some excuse, and also my selfishness, for I only thought of myself and my own feelings; but the real reason which chained my tongue into silence, which I had no power to overcome, was that I could not confess to him my love for Eugène. Even now—and I have some grey hairs, and many lines traced by thought and sorrow on my forehead, and

are not thought and sorrow the great teachers of truth?—even now a warm blush rushes to my face as I think of the possibility of such a confession at that moment. I had no thought then that Captain Brand's own love for me might have softened him. I only dreaded his anger and my own shame in the avowal. But I dared not stop to think, for fear he should read my silence wrongly.

"Oh, no! I am quite happy here, and I want to stay with Madame La Peyre. I love her; she is so sweet and gentle,—I do not wish for change."

He sighed. Those sighs made me angry, and my heart hardened; there was to me something fearfully absurd in a big brown man like Captain Brand sighing, or being sentimental. I could not—I would not go on with this talk. If Madame La Peyre did not come in two minutes I should go away.

As I set this down in my diary I wonder if there are people in the world,—I do not

know what the world is, unless it is made up of people one sees in railways, and that I caught a vision of in the streets of Havre and London, and that I used to see and hear of in Hobart Town. The world-what is it? Everyone talks of it; some people try to do what it thinks right. My old nurse used to say that it was good not to do as the world did, so it must be something, it must be real; but for this I should be inclined to think it was all talk, and that just the few people one's life brings each one in contact with must be each one's world; but then the Catechism says, "Renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world." Now, except Rosalie, who I am sure is not good, there is no one wicked in my world.

To go back to my wonderings. Are there people in the world who are always consistent—who always act as they plan to act beforehand?—or is it only I who am so miserably weak and impulsive that I am

sure to have something to be sorry for afterwards whenever I have been called on to act for myself? It was just the same when I was going to consult Mr. Donald; if I had acted out the quiet, calm behaviour I had prescribed to myself, he would never have said he loved me; if, when I am with Captain Brand, I could be always cold and dignified, instead of growing friendly with him, as at Merdon; or being, as I am to-day, so conscious and frightened that he treats me like a child, he would before this have understood my aversion, and he would altogether dislike the idea of making me his wife. What is there in him that always checks me, and makes me act against my own will?

He has gone to the window again, and stands fidgetting with the great clumsy bolt, so I have time to recover myself.

I see now that that was a mischievous impulse that seized me to speak openly. I believe it was prompted by Captain

Brand's belief in my frankness—in my foolish vanity—for I begin to see that this weak desire to be justified in the opinion of others is vanity—I was going to tell him everything, and put myself completely at his mercy, just to show that I can be frank. Ah! my father did me a cruel injury when he wrote that letter; I cannot feel free and independent with Captain Brand, as I felt at Merdon; I am like a captive in his presence, and he holds the end of my chain.

"Do you know when the Abbé and—and his pupil are to return to Château Fontaine?"

He says this so abruptly, without even turning round, that I start, and then I feel angry. This is the first time that Captain Brand has spoken to me of Eugène.

"This is not their home; they live in Paris."

I hope I have spoken for once with

dignity, and I hope he has perceived it, for he keeps silence again. A nice lively sort of husband he will make, whenever he really gets a wife! Silence, staring, and sighing seem to be his ways of proceeding, and, at first, with me he used to try scolding, until he found I would not submit to be lectured.

All at once he comes close up to me, and says very gently,

"Won't you give me a song, Gertrude? it gives me such pleasure to listen to you. I often think of your songs."

Why does not this man take the trouble to understand me? I can see through him easily enough, but he is denser than I thought if he supposes I can sing when my heart has been jumping in and out of my throat all through this miserable half-hour. Away flies my calm dignity again.

"I can't sing to-day," I say, pettishly; "I have not a bit of voice. I have been talking all the morning, first with Mrs. Day-

rell, and then with those French people; and—and—I am quite hoarse."

Captain Brand stands quietly before me, studying my face. Presently he says, in the calmest way:

"Never mind now, then, but I shall not let you off—I must have a song by-and-by. Suppose we go and find Madame La Peyre."

I was careful not to look up, I should have shown such lively gratitude at my release, and Captain Brand is so undiscerning that he might have thought I was pleased with him.

CHAPTER XIX.

FOUND OUT.

"ONLY two days more," I said next morning, while I dressed myself, "and then I shall say my last good-bye to Captain Brand. I will write to him directly I have seen Eugène, and tell him never to come to see me again."

I feel in high spirits. If Madame La Peyre takes possession of Captain Brand as she did yesterday, these two days will pass over easily. I suppose they were talking business, but they went about like a pair of lovers. I was so glad to be free, even of dear Madame La Peyre. While it lasted, that uncomfortable talk with Captain

Brand made me forget Madame Dupont's news; but it soon came back, and I went to bed with it as my last thought, and this morning woke with that glad sensation of coming joy which reality rarely equals.

"Eugène is coming, there will certainly be a letter from him this morning; he would not take me by surprise. Besides, he would not rob me of the pleasure of watching and waiting for him."

I am tempted to go down to the gate this morning, and then the dread of meeting Captain Brand, and getting into another tête-à-tête, checks me. No; I will abide by the resolution I made yesterday. I will have no more deceit. If there is a letter, let it come openly; Madame La Peyre will give it to me, and I can tell her as much as I choose, but I will have no more underhand dealings.

Somehow, Captain Brand will stay in my thoughts. I was not altogether absorbed in thinking yesterday; and his manner towards

Madame La Peyre and the Curé of Fontaine, who dined at the Château, drew my attention towards him. I have felt a strange power in him before now; but I have never before been able to isolate myself so as to study him quietly when he is with others. People say two things as if they were facts; one is, that a woman always knows when a man is really in love with her; and the other, that love takes away a man's wits. I believe both these sayings in the case of Captain Brand. I do not think I am silly enough to fancy a man in love with me when he not. At least I hope I am not so silly as this; the very trouble with which I have tried to convince myself of Captain Brand's indifference might show me that I believe in my heart that he loves me-or, at least, that he cares a great deal about me. I know it now, beyond a doubt-that look yesterday was convincing; I feel angry when I recall it. The other saying stands

on even stronger ground. I understand now why I dislike so much to have to talk alone with Captain Brand, and why I shrink from telling him the truth. His manner towards other people is different from what it is towards me—with others he is never hesitating or constrained. I could not have called him gentle or hesitating yesterday, when he was correcting that poor old Curé's ideas about England and the English; he was most decided in contradicting. He gives me the idea of being powerful, very brave, very capable, essentially strongminded and determined.

While I sat watching him I trembled. I felt that if I were to say, "Captain Brand, I can never be your wife, I do not love you well enough," he would perhaps not be angry with me, because I really think it would pain him to grieve me; but all his hesitating gentleness would vanish; he would look at me in that masterful way he had on board the Adelaide, that he had

always till I had got to Merdon, and he would say, "Never mind, my dear child; don't trouble yourself about that now; it will all come right; when I come back from this voyage it will be time enough for you to begin to love me."

With such a character, frankness and candour would be thrown away. Now I see why books say that women manage men so much more than men manage women. A certain amount of deceit is forced on them by the stubbornness of men.

On the whole, I really do think more highly of Captain Brand than I did before he came here—or, rather, I have gone back to my old idea of him at the time of the shipwreck, being encouraged to this by the behaviour of others. Madame La Peyre and the Curé were consulting him all dinner-time about Château Fontaine and the management of some troublesome villagers, and about damp, and about various other things, and he seemed to

understand everything, and to be able to advise; and I felt that, if he were only not Captain Brand, I should be proud of him. He seemed just the friend I wanted—a sort of rock to cling to in my perplexity.

I can now understand my dear mother's liking for him—only she forgot that a man may have all the qualities necessary to inspire esteem, and yet not be one bit lovable as a husband. As a friend I could like Captain Brand very much; as a husband I know I should simply hate him.

I always look up to anyone who gives me new ideas. Angélique does this. I believe I have learned more from her about myself than I ever knew before. She has taught me to think, and not to dream on in a wandering fashion; and yesterday, while I sat listening to Captain Brand, I realised that he looks at life as something we are answerable for, and evidently he thinks that his time, and all that he has, belong to other people more than

to himself. This is quite a new idea. I never thought of it before, and when I get time I shall see if it applies to me.

I suppose this shows that he is what is called a good man. No, oh! no, he cannot be truly good; no good, high-minded man would have taken advantage of a dying woman's fears, and a young girl's grief and helplessness, to marry her without being sure that she willed it. He forgot his "duty" principle then. When I recall all this I wonder at my own civility to Captain Brand. If I were not a coward, I should show him openly my abhorrence of his conduct.

This feeling has nothing to do with Eugène. I had it before I ever saw him. Eugène—his name always makes my heart beat. I shut up my diary, and I go quickly into my little study. Rosalie is there flapping about a duster. The fire is not yet lighted.

"Mademoiselle is very early," says Rosalie—"the first of all."

I do not answer. After all, I think I will go out. It is easy to avoid Captain Brand, if I see him coming. I get my book, and soon reach the bottom of the winding path through the shrubberies. go on leisurely through the Park, beneath the tall trees; some of these are huge sombre pines, so that the branches under which I pass are not all bare. The sky overhead is very pale-morning looks as if she had not been to sleep, but had kept a cold vigil. Under my feet the grass crackles with pleasant frosty sound; it scares a bright-eyed hare which is peeping timidly forward from the waste beyond. When I reach the winding water near the gate, the sound of the waterfall is hushed, and I see that the stream is frozen over. I have not wrapped myself warmly, but I do not feel the cold. Such a certainty possesses me that I shall soon see Eugène, that the blood is dancing in my veins. stop at the gate. Old Matthieu is pacing

up and down there. The old man stands still, takes off his cap, and makes me a low bow. What a comical, brown, wrinkled face he has, and such great ears, with little gold rings in them!

"Mademoiselle is well this morning. Ah, yes; it is not necessary to ask it. Mademoiselle is fresh as a rose."

"I see there is frost," I say. I cannot think of any wiser observation. I wonder why every Frenchman thinks it necessary to pay a woman a compliment.

"Yes, yes"—he wrinkles his face and shrugs his shoulders together, till he looks like an old mummy—"Mademoiselle does not like frost? nor I either, and yet Monsieur le Cure has said to me that frost is good, and to be desired, because of the roses and the fruit-trees. Frost may kill caterpillars and insects, but it is possible also to kill concierges by the same means when they are old, and when they have

rheumatism." He stoops here to rub his knees tenderly.

"Why, then, do you come out so early, Matthieu?"

The wiry old figure stands erect at once, and fixes his sharp, black eyes on my face.

"Ah! Mademoiselle," he waves his wrinkled hands, "when Mademoiselle is as old as I am, she will know that habit is a thing not to be overcome; it has always been my habit to move about and take the air. Bon, if I stay indoors I stifle. While I was young I was at the Château as my son is," here he shrugs his shoulders again. "Bon, I considered it my duty to come down every morning for the letters, and carry them to the house. What will you? My son likes better to save his legs, and since I am too old and too lame to climb the hill easily, Madame has said the facteur may mount to the Château."

"And yet you come still, to meet the postman?"

Matthieu nods, and closes his sharp eyes.

"I should come whether the facteur comes or not—that is what I tell Mademoiselle; it is not I who come, it is habit which brings me."

"You are more industrious than your son. I fear Matthieu is lazy."

The concierge looks troubled.

"I do not know," he says, "everything changes so much that perhaps the men and women change too. Years ago it took three days to get to Paris, now I hear the people say you can go in a few hours; a house can be built now in a few weeks, instead of being more than a year getting ready, and yet, Mademoiselle, I do not think the workmen or the servants work harder than they used to; they spend more, and they are more idle, but their days are not so long nor so happy as ours were when we were young."

"Well, Matthieu," I begin, "you see I am young, so I of course side with the

new order of things, and "—I fancy I was going to say something that seemed wise, but I stop.

In front of me, coming up the road from the village, is Captain Brand, swinging a wet towel in his hand.

"Ah! good morning," he smiles brightly, "I fancied I should like to try the river this morning. What an early riser you are, Gertrude!"

He speaks so freely, and takes such an intimate tone, that I determine not to walk back to the house with him.

"Do you know Matthieu?" I say; "he is our concierge, and he is such a wise old man."

Captain Brand nods, and Matthieu, though he is standing bare-headed with his cap in his hand, bows reverently, as if he understands my words. I turn to make my escape.

"Oh, please don't go away," says Captain Brand; "you seem to think I can

speak French as easily as you can, and I assure you I am in great want of help."

It is the first time that he has ever seemed to want help; it is true he has a horrible accent, but he talked glibly enough on board the *Eclair* and at Hâvre. The wind comes rushing up the hill from the river; it is icy cold standing there by the gate. Captain Brand says something to Matthieu, but I cannot make out his words.

"Plait-il, Monsieur," the old man says, respectfully.

"I told you so," the Captain says, laughing. "You will have to interpret for me."

"I was not listening," I answer coldly.

He does not seem at all vexed by my indifference. I dislike such extreme good temper, or self-control, or whatever it is that makes him so masterful. I believe nothing I could ever say or do would enrage Captain Brand. He repeats his

question, and I pass it on to Matthieu.

"Ah, but no;" the wrinkled brown face smiles and bows to both of us, and the gold rings in his ears shake and glitter. "Monsieur et Mademoiselle, it is not damp in the park; it is only inside the cottage. Ma foi! there must be something; and it is not always, Monsieur,"—he draws himself up, and his keen little eyes brighten—"that a concierge has a house with five windows and three doors to it. Has Monsieur then seen the cottage of the concierge at St. Antoine? Ah, bah! it is a rat-hole beside our cottage—fitter for a mouse than a man."

Captain Brand smiles. "Yes, yes, your windows have an imposing appearance, but I should think they let in draughts, and I fancy one door would do."

Matthieu clears his throat and waves both hands. I see that another long speech is coming, and that Captain Brand must stop and listen to it, so I move softly on to the grass just behind me, and walk swiftly away under the larches. Not so swiftly as to be unnoticed, for Captain Brand turns round and looks after me and shakes his head. I go on faster, and as soon as the trees screen me, I set off running as fast as I can.

When I reached the grassed slope, I found the frozen grass very slippery, and I fell twice before I reached the top; but I only hurt my hands a little, and I got safely to my room. It was rather rude to run away, but then, if I had stood much longer in that wind, I should certainly have taken cold; and besides, we shall not breakfast for some time yet, and I am not fond of talking before breakfast.

I soon satisfied myself with these excuses, and I was glad to find my coffee waiting in my room, for my rapid scramble up-hill had tired me. Captain Brand's manner to Matthieu set me thinking about Eugène. I wonder why he is so haughty

to inferiors? He used to speak to Matthieu the younger as if he were a dog; but then this may be customary in France with young men. If it is so, I like English ways best. We are not so familiar with our servants, but I do not think we ever speak to them so insolently. Perhaps I may be able to influence Eugène about this—I break off here in confusion—no, I must be much older and wiser than I am now, before my advice can be of use to any creature.

At breakfast Captain Brand was very lively, he talked enough for me and himself too. His bath had certainly exhilarated him.

"Ah, Miss Run-away"—he smiled at me while I was saying "good morning" to Madame La Peyre—"you missed a great deal of sage advice this morning; the concierge grew quite eloquent after you left; and then came the postman, and told us the news of Caudebec. A carriage coming from Lillebonne last evening was driven

down-hill too fast; it upset, and the pole was broken; no one could be found to mend it but Monsieur Matthieu, the blacksmith, who, it appears, is in no way related to Matthieu the concierge."

"Ah, no, indeed," said Madame La Peyre; "he is a very fine, big man, Monsieur Matthieu, of Caudebec."

"And Monsieur Ferblanc, the tinman, has again beaten his wife," continued Captain Brand, laughing.

"Ah, mon Dieu, it is sad!" cried Madame La Peyre, lifting up her pretty hands
—"that little man has always been a mauvais sujet."

A little while after, Rosalie came in with the letters. I was wondering why she brought them—this seemed to be one of the few duties which Matthieu the younger roused himself to perform—and I looked up at her; her light, yellow-fringed eyes were fixed on me with an expression that made me turn away at once. She looked perfectly spiteful as she put the letters down before Madame La Peyre.

"Ah, pardon, Madame," she said, when she had waited for Madame La Peyre to look at them, "but there is one for Mademoiselle, and I think I must give it to Mademoiselle herself, for she has been so anxious to get it from the facteur."

She walked slowly round the table, stopped behind my chair, and dropped the letter in my plate.

When my hair is quite white, and my face quite wrinkled, and I am an old, infirm woman, forgetting alike the joys and sorrows of my life, I doubt if I can ever forget those awful minutes—the stump, stump, stump, of Rosalie's heavy shoes seemed to be stamping on my heart as they echoed on the bare wooden floor. All the blood in my body flew up into my face, and I had a choked feeling in my ears and throat. I did not hear or see anything—even the letter on my plate was a mere white patch

in the sort of blurred indistinctness around me. I suppose I nearly fainted.

No one spoke. The silence seemed awful. Then I saw Eugène's writing on the letter, and looking up, I saw, as if I were in a dream, Madame and Captain Brand gazing at me with shocked, startled faces; and then Captain Brand was bending forward and speaking to Madame La Peyre. "Gertrude," she said.

I hardly know how I got courage to move, but I rose up, took my letter, and walked out of the room without saying a word.

CHAPTER XX.

SENTENCE.

Talways seems to me that those unhappy criminals sentenced to be flogged once a week till all the lashes are given, are much more to be pitied than the man who gets all his punishment at once—the anticipation must be so much harder to bear than the lashes themselves. I had often looked forward to this moment, and told myself I should really be glad to have a clear explanation with Captain Brand, and to be freed from all this miserable restraint and secresy; and yet, now that I was actually found out, I felt that it would be much easier to jump down from the top

of the steep cliff into the little river below than to face Captain Brand.

I was standing at the top of the cliff as I thought this. I had fled at once to my room, and seeing no hope of privacy there, for there are no bolts to the bedroom doors at Château Fontaine, I snatched my hat and shawl, and ran down the spiral staircase leading from my old bedroom. I knew this would only lead me to the place where I had said "good-bye" to Eugène; but still that was at the back of the house, and I felt quite sure I could find my way down the wooded height to the little bridge over the river, now that the trees were leafless.

Almost without knowing how I got there, I found myself on the heights just below the little formal garden. The trees were planted very thickly, but still I could trace out the path leading to the bridge; there were many paths winding in and out, up and down, among the slender, close-set tree-stems; but most of these misled purposely, so as to give the idea of a much larger space than the wood really covered; only one led down, with many turns and twists, to the bridge. I could not take away the bridge, or close it behind me, and yet I had a vague feeling of safety, at least temporary, when I reached the other bank of the river.

The trees were so much larger here that their trunks gave some shelter, and I had an unspeakable longing to hide myself from everyone. There was one old oak trunk, so overgrown with ivy, that the branches a-top were stunted in growth, but the ivy was so luxuriant that it made up for want of height by the breadth which its shining green foliage spread round the trunk. I crouched down at the foot of this tree, and then I cried heartily—not from fear of Captain Brand, but because I was utterly crushed with shame, and because I knew that the shame of my pres-

ent trouble was caused by my own fault. Certainly Eugène had asked me to keep his letters a secret from everyone. But what then? Eugène was not my husband, and I was not bound to obey him. Try as I would to seem less black in my own eyes, I saw too plainly that I had done that which I knew to be wrong and base. Ah! that was what wrung my heart with such keenness of anguish. I had given Captain Brand a right to despise me. You are, perhaps, thinking it strange I did not read my letter. Ah, no! I shrank from it as the cause of my present misery. I did not even take it out of the pocket where I had thrust it away as I fled upstairs.

And yet it was not the letter that had betrayed me. Captain Brand had not seen it close, and although Madame must have seen it was a French letter, still it is possible she had not recognised the handwriting. It is I who have betrayed and convicted myself by my shame and strange behaviour.

I remember I had scarcely begun breakfast when I walked off in that determined way out of the room. Well, am I really sorry? The end must have come some day; and it has come. Certainly I would not have gone through any more deceit to keep it off. Captain Brand will ask what was the matter with me, and I must tell him.

My head aches terribly, and my heart beats till it seems as if it would burst its way out of my body. In a far-off, feeble way, like a dream in which one tries to grasp something that always eludes or falls from one's fingers, I know that I ought to set my thoughts in order, that I ought to be prepared with an answer when I see Captain Brand—for I shall have to see him. There is no use in crying and trembling and shivering, as I have been shivering for fully five minutes; if I have been wrong I must take the consequences bravely, and own frankly that I have been wrong, without any excuses; I can do

nothing else.

It was a great pity that Captain Brand did not find me while this penitent fit lasted; I should, perhaps, for once in my life, have behaved well, and the end might have been different. Certainly the old line "Souvent femme varie" was verified in my case.

At last I left off crying, and leaned back among the glossy ivy-leaves. I covered my face with my hands, utterly exhausted, and weary of all this strain. I do not remember anything after this, till I heard the dried twigs snapping and crackling under a rapid tread, and then I gave myself up to my fate. The sound did not come from the side of the bridge; it was still so distant that I could have escaped through the trees and across the stream to the Château; but for what? Only to delay this meeting, which must happen sooner or later; so I sit still, listening to the sharp cry each twig gives

as it snaps into fragments under the firm, fast-approaching footsteps.

I give a sigh of relief when at last they pause silently before me. I cannot look up. There is just a little waiting, but only very brief, and then he says, in a sort of forced voice:

"I must speak to you, but it shall be where you please. Shall it be here, or indoors?"

I try to look up and answer fearlessly, but I cannot. I answer in a sullen, hushed way,

"Why not here?—it does not signify where;" and then I rise up, for I feel choked sitting there at his feet.

"What was the matter with you just now, when you went away?"

I make a great effort, but all I can say is, "I had a letter."

He moves about restlessly and snaps more twigs, but then, seemingly, he makes up his mind. "I wish you to tell me who wrote that letter, and why you showed so much agitation in receiving it."

Can I get any words out? I try twice, and my tongue moves drily without sound. Then I strain every nerve, and say quietly,

"The letter is from Monsieur le Comte de Vaucresson; it agitated me because I——"

I cannot do it; I cannot say out in words, "I love him." I look at Captain Brand with an effort; I must know what his face is like. He is pale—so pale that he is quite ugly. I did not think a sunburnt man could turn to such a ghastly hue.

"I see you have some grace left," he says at last, sternly. "How many of these letters have you received?"

At his anger I feel braver.

"I do not acknowledge your right to ask, but I will tell you; this is the third letter I have received."

"And you have answered them?"

He shouts this out in such a loud, terrible voice that I am angry and frightened all at once.

"Of course I have; but you have no right to question me."

I move forwards towards the path that leads to the bridge.

"Stay here, you must," he says, not quite so loud, but very sternly; and as I still move on he grasps my wrist so tightly in one of his hands that I could not wrench it away if I tried my utmost. "Listen to me, Gertrude. Setting aside all lawful right of my own, I pledged myself to your mother to watch over you and guide you. If you are not aware of your folly, I must show it to you. Even as an unmarried woman, you have acted wrongly in carrying on a clandestine correspondence, but—"

"Stop," I say, breathless, and panting with eagerness; "that is just what I am —I am unmarried; do not dare to say I am your wife."

He drops my arm instantly, and falls back a step or two, as if I had struck him.

"What do you mean?" he says, in a puzzled voice. "How can I help being your husband?"

Some power suddenly brings back my courage; I turn round, so that I face him, my hands clasped tightly together.

"I mean, what you must know I have always meant, what I should have said already, only I was a coward—you had no right to marry me against my will; I was not properly married; and I will never consider myself your wife, or acknowledge your authority. Till now I have concealed my correspondence with Monsieur de Vaucresson; for the future I shall write to him, and receive his letters as often as I please. But for him my life would be hateful."

Till I came to Eugène's name I had gone on firmly, I had looked straight at Captain Brand, and I had felt my eyes flash while I spoke; till then he had seemed cowed by my excitement; but when I came to this I hesitated, I felt my face flush, and my eyes drooped, for was I not confessing my love? I suppose this broke the spell that had controlled Captain Brand. I did not look up, but his voice told me how angry he was.

"I may have been to blame on board the Adelaide, I will not argue that point, but I see I have quite mistaken your whole character;"—he spoke coldly, almost contemptuously,—"you seemed to me so frank, so innocent, that I thought indulgence and patience were all you needed from me. I am very sorry I so mistook you, for this mistaken indulgence has only given reins to your misconduct."

He paused for some minutes, and drew a deep breath. When he went on, his voice sounded less angry, but even colder.

"You do not care, of course, for my opinion; but I tell you that no sorrow I have ever known gave me half the pain I felt this morning when I saw you suddenly convicted of deceit. My God! I would

sooner have died than have seen it. Merdon I doubted you for an instant; and then reproached myself severely for my suspicion. Now listen. I have had time to think while I have been seeking for you this morning. I am hateful to you, and you long to be free. If I can set you free, I will do so. It is no light sacrifice to give up the hope I had of winning in time your How I have loved you, you will never know, and you do not care to know; but do not mistake me"-he said this so sternly that I looked up with a half cry of terror; he met my eyes for just an instant, and then turned away, as if he hated the sight of me-"the girl I loved, whose love I wished to win, was artless. frank, innocent of all evil; not a girl who would listen to the folly of the first stranger who flattered her vanity, and then carry on a secret correspondence with him. God knows how many falsehoods you have told, you poor unhappy child; but if I can

help it, you shall tell no more—you shall not sink lower yet."

I had covered up my face long ago, and by this time I was sobbing heartily. Oh, the agony his words gave me! for though, as I thought then, he made me out worse than I was, yet I knew some of his words were true, and I felt how a high-minded, honourable man must despise this wretched meanness and cowardice—for it had come to me all at once that I had been a wretched coward with regard to Captain Brand. It may be that the prospect of release helped my penitence. I only know that I could have gone down on my knees and asked him to forgive me.

He left off speaking, and I sank down at the foot of the ivy-tree; but I could not check my sobs all at once—they sounded very loud in the stillness round us; I heard nothing else except the falling of a twig now and then from the larch branches, or

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the scramble of a squirrel in search of beech-nuts.

"Have you anything to say to me?" he said, more gently. "I shall leave Château Fontaine at once."

I forgot Eugène, myself, everything but the intense longing for Captain Brand's forgiveness; ah! for more than forgiveness, for what I could not get, for what it was agony to feel might never be again; to be in his thoughts as I had once been. And the knowledge of the hopelessness of this, the consciousness that, like wretched Humpty Dumpty, I had flung myself down, and shattered all that I once seemed to him, kept me dumb with shame and sorrow. I do not know what prompted my words, but I said, in a weary, wretched voice,

"Shall I never see you again?"

"Never—unless you specially wish it,—I cannot,"—he stopped, fidgeted, and then stamped his foot on the ground, and went on in a steady, hard voice, a voice that

told me how utterly I had fallen in his opinion,—"I would not, if I could, forget the promise I made to your mother; whatever you may be to me in the future cannot release me from that sacred promise. If you ever want help or advice from me, Gertrude, ask it freely; but," he went on bitterly, "there seems small chance of your wanting this, feeling as you feel towards me. No, I think we need never meet again."

And what did I say in answer to these words, which even now, as I write them, stir my heart so painfully? Nothing, not a word.

"Good-bye, God bless you!" Captain Brand said at last; he made no attempt to take my hand in his. I suppose he waited for me to offer it, but I was powerless, so heart-stricken that I just bent my head in reply to his words, that was all. I tried to say good-bye, but no words came.

I did not dare to look up till the sound x 2

of his footsteps told me he was already some distance from the spot where I sat crouching beneath the ivy-tree.

As I write this down, with the knowledge that it will be read in quiet leisure by some who were perhaps never deeply moved in their lives, I feel that I shall be called cold-hearted, unnatural, everything that is most unwomanly, because I did not speak, because I did not own my fault; and yet, though I blame myself deeply and strongly for much of this part of my conduct, I know that I am blameless here. Captain Brand's words had so stirred my heart that I was at that moment in earnest to do right; it was no self-will, no power of my own at all, that kept me silent. I was simply stricken dumb by shame and by contrition—physically unable to speak.

I had never before been accused or convicted of any serious fault. At home, if I had not been taken much notice of, still any irrepressibleness or impulsiveness—

and I think this had been the worst of my misdemeanours—had been smiled at as ignorance and rawness, and only seriously regarded by my sister Jane; but to be openly accused of falsehood and deceit, and to know that I deserved the accusation, made me dumb and helpless. "Is it I myself?" I said, in stupefied wonder, and then I felt powerless to move. I must stay here, where he branded me with my fault. Fall yet lower, did he say? How could I? Could any fault be so black as falsehood?

The wind came rustling round the ivied trunk, it was pitilessly cold—I shrank back among the ivy for shelter, but it did not yield much. I think the cold must have been at my heart, for it felt like ice. Once I made a sudden movement forward to the bridge, and then I drew back with a shiver of fear at my own daring. Had not Captain Brand said he no longer cared for me; that I was nothing to him? He

had cast me off for ever, unless I should sink so low as to have no friend left but himself. This was how I read his fare-I could not force myself on well words. I strained my ears for the his notice. sound of departing wheels, but none came. How long should I have to stay in that death-like stillness, with only my own thoughts?—and I seemed to turn away from them, and dread the stings they would give to my already burdened conscience. A mocking voice whispered, "You have longed for this-longed to be told by Captain Brand that he sets you free; you have felt as if the thought alone would make you dance and sing, and set your pulses in a glow. And now-!"

Is it true, that which Mrs. Dayrell said—happiness is only in expectation? Can nothing one has wished for make one glad when it really comes? It is some relief to think that I can look Eugène honestly in the face, that I can tell him I am almost

free, and no one can prevent me from writing to him. But, strangely enough, I feel more guilty now that I have confessed than I did when I was deceitful. There is a big stone in my heart which will choke me if it does not go away.

CHAPTER XXI.

LIGHT IN DARKNESS.

There was no obstacle between me and Eugène; instead of the joy I had anticipated, I was crushed with shame and sorrow. I would have given up every other thing to hear Captain Brand speak at

Merdon, to feel that I had never merited his contempt. Ah! that was the sting—merited his contempt. It was not his contempt that stung me; it was the heavy ache at my heart, which said I deserved every word he had spoken.

Ache, ache, ache; a dull, aching stupor. It seems to make me too heavy to move. I cannot bear it; I must struggle to be free from it. I must run after Captain Brand and implore him to unsay his words, and tell him I cannot live without his good opinion.

I start up again, and look round me. I see by the changed light that it must be a long time since he went away; he has left Château Fontaine by this time. Now that I am fully roused I know that this idea of going after him was foolish and unreal. How could I ever have got courage, even if I had found him, to make such an appeal? And then, while I stand, stupefied with this miserable heartache, something

bids me try to bear it—says that this very pain is good for me, if I own that I have deserved it, and do not rebel. This is such a new light to me that there is a startling, almost an awful solemnity in it.

I stand thinking, and there comes a cruncking of the brittle twigs near the bridge. It may be he is coming back after all, and I shake with terror; but as I listen I hear the rustling of a skirt over the fallen leaves, and I know it is Angélique, even before her tall, straight figure appears between the leafless trees.

"Ah!"—she gives me a little look, and then her eyes go beyond me—"I have been looking for Mademoiselle everywhere. I came to find her to see Monsieur l'Abbé."

Although I know how much depends on the Abbé's arrival, I say calmly,

"He is come at last, is he?" And then I add, with an effort—"Did he come before Captain Brand went away?"

Angélique's eyes move swiftly back to

my face, and the simple question in them makes me shy and confused.

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

It is too cruel of Angélique. She must know all I want to ask, and she will not spare me.

"Well," I say, crossly, "and did they see one another?"

"But yes, Mademoiselle. The Abbé has met Monsieur le Capitaine as he came in from the park, and has shut himself up with him for a long time; and then Monsieur le Capitaine has sent for me, and asked me to seek for Mademoiselle; and then he has gone away in the voiture which brought Monsieur l'Abbé."

"And Mr. Dayrell, is he come too?"

"No, Mademoiselle, the Abbé is alone."
My heart felt easier at this news. In
these first moments of penitence it was a
relief to hear that Eugène had not come to
Château Fontaine. I could not explain it
to myself, but my mind was so full of Cap-

tain Brand that it would have seemed like sacrilege to admit any pleasant thoughts into my sorrow.

I went across the bridge, while Angélique followed me in silence. The river looked mournful in the cold, grey light-it was in harmony with my feelings-and the cobweb-like tracery of branches in the wood below the Château had a red tinge that seemed to warm the cold grey haze. I wished there were leaves on the trees: shade and gloom would have suited me better than this bare openness; for, I suppose, next to the blessing of some loving heart, into which one may pour every grief, and even every petty vexation, one seeks for shadow as a hiding-place for feelings which instinct says should be sheltered from the prying eyes of the outside world, till we have learned to hide them ourselves under a mask of smiles.

As I walk along I go back to the outside world, and remember that I have to meet

Madame La Peyre as well as the Abbé.

"Angélique," I said with a sort of groan, at which she started, "I dare say you will think me very wicked, but I believe if I could slip into the river by accident—you see it is wide enough and deep enough now to drown anyone—I should be much happier than I can ever be, living on here, a trouble to everyone."

"What is the matter with Mademoiselle?" Angélique looked just as I knew she would look—startled and grieved, but not a bit angry. I should like to make her angry. I begin to think extra good people do as much harm as others, if they provoke one to try to irritate them.

"Well, why not? I should like to know what there is in my life that is so well worth living for; or what good or pleasure I am to anyone?"

"Does Mademoiselle wish me to tell her why she should wish to live?"

I never heard her speak so gravely. I

look at her against my will, and I am hushed out of all petulance, there is such a sweet, serious earnestness in her face.

- "Yes, if you please," I say gently.
- "Mademoiselle knows as well as I can tell her that we have to live our lives, not only to find pleasure in them, or to do our own will in them, but because they are the gift of God."

This seems to me silly.

- "But, according to that, everything is God's gift—the sky, the trees, the flowers, the very air we breathe. I do not see that this fact makes my life happier."
- "I told Mademoiselle that she knew—and she is so clever that she will find out for herself—and yet," she looks very sad, "I sometimes think that it is because Madame Dayrell and Mademoiselle are heretics that they have not found out this—that le bon Dieu gives us all we have, and it is all His—not ours."

Something mysterious in this, I think

rebelliously. Is Angélique really going to preach her own doctrines at last? I go on faster. I am half ashamed of the eagerness I have to make her explain herself, and she cannot see my face if she walks behind.

"You are too deep for me—I do not understand—unless you mean that we are mere puppets; and certainly I have not been taught that. I have been taught that my will is my own, to do right or wrong as I choose."

"Yes, but yes," she says quickly, and she comes up beside me, "that is what I mean, that Mademoiselle has said; our will is our own, and we can give it, our will to le bon Dieu—it, and our love also. Ah, Mademoiselle, even the poor beggars have two offerings they can make to Him."

I walk on in hushed silence. Something in the effect of her words upon me says that Angélique is speaking truth; and yet I rebelagainst learning truthfrom Angélique. She is very good. I have not lived

so many months a witness to her gentle, loving, truthful ways without becoming sure that she is a religious woman; but then she is an inferior and a Roman Catholic, and all my prejudices of nature and education rise against such teaching.

"Still," I say, half aloud, "one must get good from goodness, and not one of the Apostles was a gentleman except St. Paul."

"Angélique,"—I cannot look at her: I feel my own ignorance, and I am ashamed of it,—"I used to learn about an old woman who always denied herself what she most wished for; do you mean to say that that foolish old creature was right?"

But, as I ask the question, I seem to see a new meaning in a text I have often read, and have even learned by heart, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." I have read it like this:—we are to keep the commandments because it is our duty to keep them; from a certain cold, conventional love of God which I have grown up to suppose every one has, but which I believe in my own case is far more truly a cold shrinking fear of punishment if I break any of the commandments. Now, in the new and glowing light which Angélique's words shed into my heart, and which seem to be warming it from its cold aching weight, I read the words differently. If I really loved God I should try to do His will, and keep His law, simply to please Him, and as the only real way in which I could show my love to Him: and I should shrink from sin because He hates it, and because He suffered to destroy its power.

The thought grew till I felt helpless to struggle against it. I must give up my will and my love, and all would be well. In that moment of intense conviction I looked on my will as if it were indeed a puppet, and took it for granted that in one moment I could transfer to God all the love I had hitherto spent on self. All these thoughts

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must have been very rapid, for Angélique answered as if I had just spoken.

"I do not quite understand Mademoiselle. Le bon Dieu is so merciful that, if we love Him, He puts good desires into our hearts; we have only to be sure our will is the same as His, and then it is quite easy. I do not think, Mademoiselle, that the old woman you speak of was a Catholic."

I laughed, and Angélique kept silence. I suppose she was shocked at my levity. I said suddenly—

- "Then I suppose you think that it was God's will that I was married to Captain Brand, and that my duty is to submit."
- "But there can be no doubt," she said simply.

I faced round upon her, and caught both her stiff elbows tightly.

"Angélique, you are a dear old thing, but were you ever in love in your life?"

A faint blush rose in her old face, and I kissed her.

"Come," I said, "I will listen to you now. I begin to think you will have some sympathy for me."

"I loved my husband, Mademoiselle; it is the duty of a wife to love her husband."

"Ah, hush, Angélique! Now I see you know nothing of love; duty and love are distinct. If I only loved a husband by duty, I should soon grow wicked and hate him. Ah, don't look shocked;" and then my sadness came back like a sudden wave, crushing all the bright peace which had stolen into my struggling soul. "Suppose I love some one else who is not my husband. What am I to do then?"

I said this partly from contradiction, and also because I thought that Angélique would show her Roman Catholic bigotry by telling me at once that I was sinful, and that such a love was not to be allowed. Some reticence had come to me, but still I was ready to rebel.

She looked very sad, and she gazed earnestly at me before she answered.

"Mademoiselle must pray—she must pray day and night to be delivered from this danger. Ah, if Mademoiselle would pray to Blessed Mary and our Holy Saints she would be safe."

"No, Angélique, that is wrong; I could never do that."

I turned away; it seemed to me that by this flagrant effort at conversion Angélique had weakened all her former words.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.







